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NATIONAL REVIEW

Mrs. Grievance

MICHELLE OBAMA AND HER DISCONTENT

Mark Steyn

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APRIL 21, 2008 VOL. LX, NO. 7

NATIONAL REVIEW

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■ **COVER STORY**

Mrs. Obama’s America

Michelle Obama is most famous for declaring, about her husband’s candidacy, that “for the first time in my adult lifetime I’m really proud of my country.” Just a throwaway line reflecting no more than the narcissism and self-absorption required to mount a presidential campaign in the 21st century? Well, possibly—were it not for the fact that almost every time the candidate’s wife speaks extemporaneously she seems to offer some bon mot consistent with that bleak assessment. *By Mark Steyn*

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letters to the editor

UNDISCIPLINED PETITION

You note in your April 7 issue ("The Week") that the upcoming United Methodist Church General Conference will consider a petition for economic sanctions on Israel. But there's rather less here than meets the eye.

There are more than 1,500 petitions up for debate this year, and anyone with an axe to grind can submit one so long as it has a colorable relation to a paragraph in the United Methodist *Book of Discipline* or a subject in the *Book of Resolutions*. I have scanned the 91-page agenda, and there are items on it even loonier than this.

My pastor tells me that anti-Israeli resolutions have been regularly submitted—and regularly rejected—for the past 30 years. No church will ever be free of knaves and fools, but the overwhelming majority of United Methodists firmly support Israel's right to exist and to defend itself against terrorism.

Claude Tison
Via e-mail

THE EDITORS RESPOND: We hope that Mr. Tison speaks for the majority of Methodists when he describes the anti-Israeli activities of his denomination as the proper province of "knaves and fools." But the anti-Israeli agenda in the United Methodist Church is hardly confined to the fringes. The New England Conference already has voted in favor of an economic boycott of Israel, as have the Virginia United Methodists. In addition, comparisons of the Jewish state to Nazi Germany and apartheid South Africa, as well as a particularly graceless characterization of Israel's founding as "original sin," have appeared in publications bearing the imprimatur of Methodist organizations.

OBLASPHEMY?

I cannot imagine how a magazine that carries advertisements for socially responsible Catholic investing, and for DVDs from Ignatius Press, can have a cover on which Barack Obama is compared—however satirically—to Christ (April 7, "Behold, a Savior Is Born!"). There should be limits to the use of religious metaphor in making political points, and this, arriving shortly after the holiest day of the Christian calendar, crosses the line. You owe Christians everywhere an apology.

Barbara Harty-Golder
Lookout Mountain, Tenn.

IN FAVRE WE HOPE

NATIONAL REVIEW always provokes, but reading the articles of Jonah Goldberg and Stephen F. Hayes back to back staggered me ("The Limits of Hope" and "Let Us Now Praise No. 4," April 7). I'm ready to believe Mr. Goldberg's argument that utopian dreams are forever out of reach, but then again I saw Brett Favre play—and whispered "amen" as I finished Mr. Hayes's tribute.

Gerald K. Masters
Newark, N.Y.

MISSING PAGES

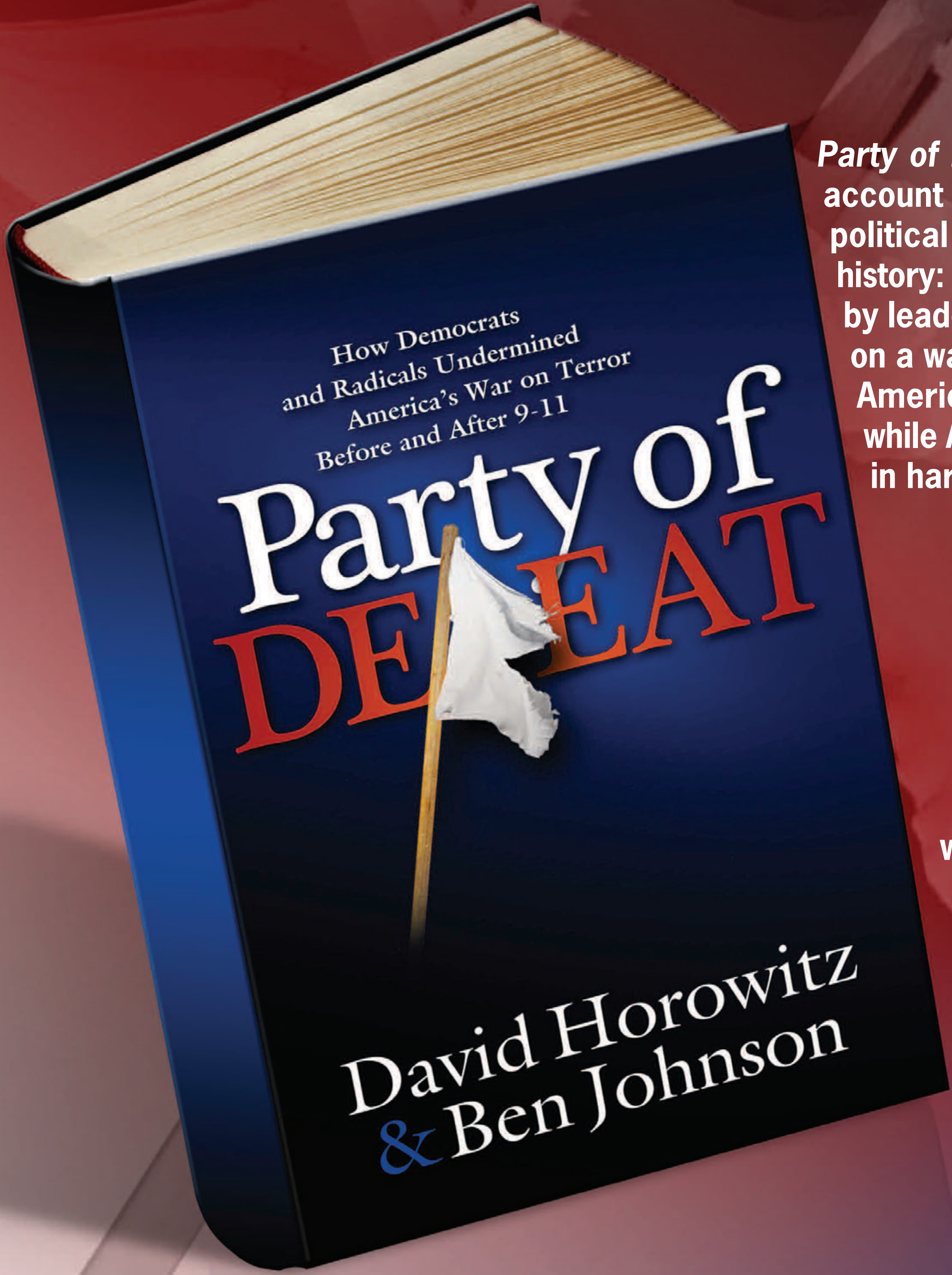
The saddest moment came later than I expected. After perusing the March 24 issue devoted to WFB, I hoped my pensiveness was over. But the arrival of your April 7 issue prompted my habitual immediate dive into the back of the magazine, in search of "On the Right"—and its absence prompted a deep melancholy. The finality of this new truth hit me right between the eyes.

Richard D. May
Nashville, Tenn.

NATIONAL REVIEW encourages letters to the editor. Letters can be submitted by e-mail to letters@nationalreview.com. Please include your full name, address, and daytime phone number. Letters will be edited for space and clarity.

"*Party of Defeat* is a well-documented and disturbing account of the unprecedented attacks by leaders of the Democratic Party on a war they supported and then turned against. In a democracy like ours, criticism of war policy is legitimate and necessary. But deliberate undermining of a war policy, the authors of this book argue, is a different matter. Every American concerned about the future of their country in the war on terror should consider the arguments in this book."

Seventeen members of the Senate & House of Representatives. *



Party of Defeat is an eye-opening account of one of the greatest political betrayals in American history: the unprecedented attack by leaders of an opposition party on a war they authorized and on America's commander-in-chief while America's troops were still in harm's way.

–Sean Hannity

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THE WEEK

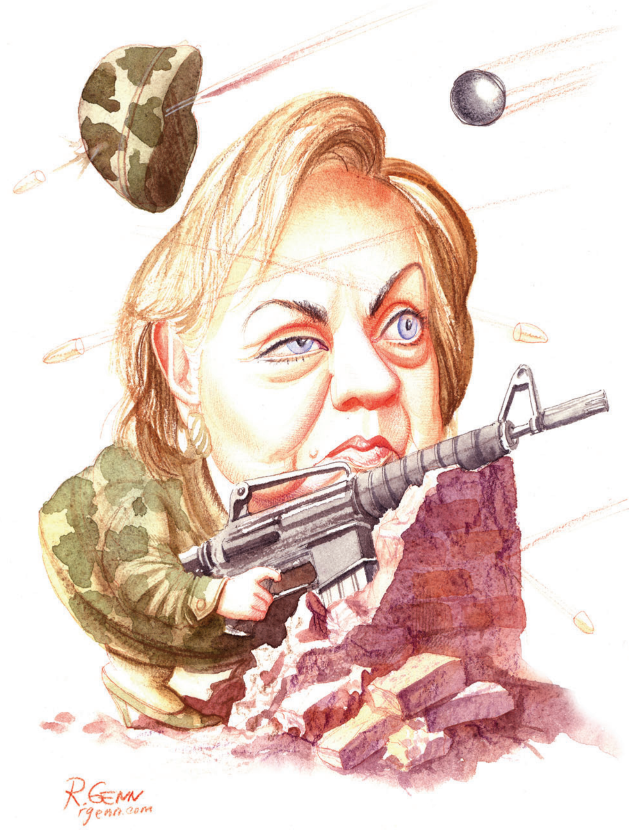
■ If she really wants to know what it's like to land under fire, she could always ask Senator McCain.

■ John McCain is reintroducing himself to the American public by telling people his biography. His military service and his endurance as a POW reflect great credit upon him, and should be better known. McCain is right to resist the cynics who say that Americans no longer care about duty, honor, and country. But they care about other things, too. National security is highly unlikely to be as resonant an issue this year as it was in 2004, no matter what McCain does. He needs to show Americans that he has a compelling domestic agenda, too: one that reforms health care, the tax code, and other institutions that Washington has made dysfunctional. If he can do that, his current lead in the polls just might hold.

■ If Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton have their way, though, the public will think McCain's chief campaign proposal is to wage "100 years of war" in Iraq. McCain said at a New Hampshire town-hall meeting in January that if Americans aren't taking casualties, we can stay in Iraq a hundred years, on the model of our long-term troop presence in countries such as South Korea and Japan. The comment was true and unexceptional, if prone to distortion by opportunistic rivals. Cue Obama and Clinton.

■ "I remember landing under sniper fire. There was supposed to be some kind of a greeting ceremony at the airport, but instead we just ran with our heads down to get into the vehicles." So Hillary Clinton recently described landing in Tuzla, Bosnia, to meet American troops in March 1996. The point of the story was to show how close she was, as first lady, to danger as well as power. Trouble is, there was no gunfire and no run. "If that had happened, we would have made a picture of it," said the Associated Press photographer. "She never had her head down," said the American military commander who greeted her at the airport. "There was no sniper threat that I know of." Obama and an increasingly Hillary-hostile press piled on. But why this slip, just now? Because there was supposed to be some kind of a coronation ceremony in Denver in August, and on Election Day in November, but instead Hillary is running with her head down. Once again, there are no bullets, but the dangers facing her campaign and her hopes are very real.

■ But it is also true that Clinton has won nearly as many votes, and nearly as many delegates, as Barack Obama. While the remaining primaries are highly unlikely to give her a lead in delegates, he is unlikely to have an outright majority. Under these circumstances, it is hard to see why Clinton would heed the many Obama supporters, including some pundits, who are urging her to withdraw from the race. Superdelegates are going to decide who wins the nomination. They will probably pick Obama. But it is possible that by the time the Democrats have their convention, Clinton will look like a stronger candidate than Obama, and that superdelegates will vote accordingly. In the meantime, pass the popcorn.



ROMAN GENN

■ Heath Shuler, a Democratic congressman from North Carolina, has introduced a bill to get serious about fighting illegal immigration. Nancy Pelosi and company are refusing to hold a vote on it, since it would probably pass. Republicans have organized a petition to force a vote. Now Shuler is charging that John McCain has called Republicans to ask them not to sign it. McCain's campaign denies the charge, and some Republicans argue that Shuler is trying to divert attention from his own party's hostility to enforcing the law. McCain has it in his power to end this controversy. He should urge Pelosi to allow a vote.

■ When you buy something with a Visa or MasterCard, the credit-card company gets a portion of the proceeds. Usually it is less than 2 percent. Merchants consent to paying this fee in return for the benefits they get from accepting credit cards: more customers, fewer bounced checks. Merchants would like

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NR408

THE WEEK...

to get those benefits for less, which is understandable. A group of merchants is lobbying for Congress to pass a bill that would authorize judges to set the credit-card fees. A few Republicans support this bill, saying that the fees are a "hidden tax" on consumers. Actually, they are a cost of doing business, and the bill is an attempt at price control. Put it back on the shelf.

■ New York is a "sanctuary city." Mayor Michael Bloomberg's Executive Order 41 forbids city employees from reporting an illegal immigrant to federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents unless the immigrant has committed other crimes. So Palestinian Waheed Saleh, an illegal immigrant, has filed a complaint against a New York City police officer for reporting him to the feds. Mr. Saleh, who drives an unlicensed cab, seems to have a short fuse: Police have broken up at least two fights he got into. In retaliation, he filed complaints against the police. He then found himself in the custody of ICE, and claims that city police retaliated for his complaints by reporting his immigration status, in violation of the mayoral order. Our latest news is that he is out on bail, whereabouts unknown. Should you encounter him, do *not* alert ICE, unless you want to find yourself at the receiving end of another lawsuit.

■ Who would have thought that the Bush administration would err by being too soft in a death-penalty case? But that is what happened in *Medellín* v. *Texas*, in which the administration sided with Mexican murderers over the American courts that convicted them. Rapist/murderer José Ernesto Medellín, a Mexican illegally in the United States, was read his *Miranda*

Deviant Economics

BARACK OBAMA and Hillary Clinton spend a lot of time railing against the Bush tax cuts. Listen to their stump speeches on the topic and you come away with the sense that President Bush, with his irresponsible cuts, has nearly bankrupted the nation. Supporters of the cuts, meanwhile, have viewed them as reasonable, prudent, and fully justified by the latest economic research.

It would be possible to dedicate an entire issue of this magazine to discussing that research and still make little progress toward changing the minds of even the most economically savvy Obama supporters. People who believe that the tax cuts were bad policy tend to put more weight on studies that question the merits of supply-side economics, and less weight on studies that conform to the predictions of Mr. Laffer and his many fans.

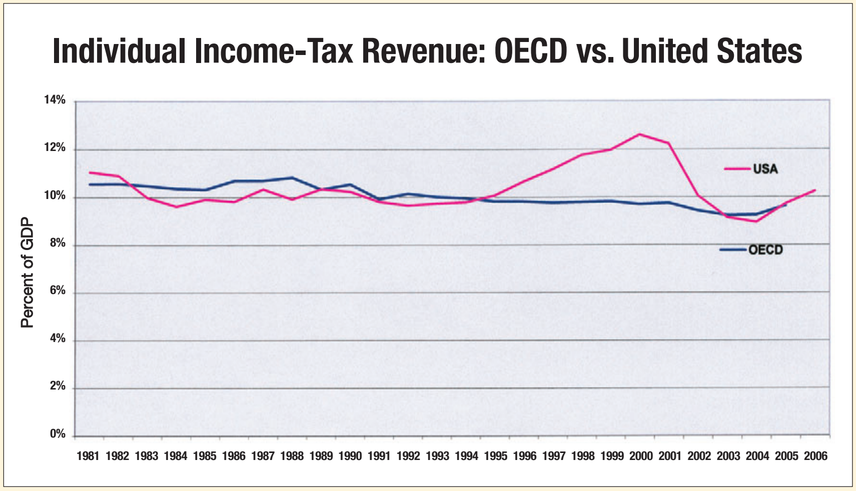
But what of the general public? As reporters sort through these debates, they must write at a far lower level of sophistication than that of the studies in question. Since *New York Times* readers don't know econometrics, they are instead offered pseudo-analysis. The economists who agree with supply-side economics are generally described in terms to suggest that they are nut jobs. Those who disagree with supply-siders are "distinguished professors" or "senior fellows" at "nonpartisan" institutes. We are invited to judge, not the arguments, but the reasonableness of those who make them—and it is clear what our judgment is supposed to be.

But interestingly enough, it's possible to determine with some precision whether a policy has been formulated by nut jobs. To see how, consider the following statement: "U.S. fiscal policy in recent years has deviated wildly from fiscal policy in other developed nations." If that's true, one can presumably make the case that U.S. policymakers have ignored policy norms. (This is of course just what one would expect nut jobs to do.) If the claim is false, however, then it's rather harder to claim that American fiscal policy is in the hands of kooks.

Let's apply that method to the question of income-tax cuts. The nearby chart depicts recent trends in the share of GDP that governments collect through income taxes. The purple line represents the U.S.; the blue line represents the average for large developed nations in the OECD, excluding the U.S. And the story is clear: For most of recent history, the U.S. share was about equal to that of the OECD generally. It *did* deviate wildly at one point—in the second term of President Clinton, when the U.S. was collecting a markedly higher percentage of its GDP in income-tax revenue than were its fellow OECD members. But the Bush tax cuts returned us to normalcy.

On the matter of tax policy, then, who was more reasonable, Bush or Clinton? The data tell a clear story: that Clinton deviated much farther from the norm than his successor has.

—KEVIN A. HASSETT



SOURCES: OECD; BUREAU OF ECONOMIC ANALYSIS FOR REVENUE DATA; IMF ECONOMIC OUTLOOK FOR GDP. REVENUE TOTALS INCLUDE DATA FOR BOTH NATIONAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS. OECD AVERAGE EXCLUDES COUNTRIES FOR WHICH DATA ARE UNAVAILABLE.

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rights, was represented vigorously by competent legal counsel—and was sentenced to death. He was not, however, informed by Texas authorities that he had a right to have the Mexican consulate notified of his circumstances. His lawyers never raised the issue at trial, and it was years before they thought to make an issue of it. Mexico, which objects to the use of capital punishment, sued the United States in the International Court of Justice. The court ruled for Mexico in its *Avena* decision, jeopardizing the conviction of Medellín and at least 50 other Mexican murderers on death row. The administration ordered state courts to abide by *Avena*. The justices Bush appointed to the Supreme Court took a better approach, issuing one of the most important international-law decisions in the history of the court. Chief Justice Roberts's opinion confirmed that laws must be enacted by Congress, not by the president or the judiciary, still less by the fiat of a foreign court operating under the auspices of the United Nations.

■ Lenin is sometimes credited with coining the term "useful idiots" to describe Westerners who unwittingly collaborated with the Soviet Union. Perhaps it's time to pull that Cold War phrase out of retirement and apply it to the current conflict. On March 26, the Department of Justice said that Saddam Hussein's spy agency had funded a junket for three anti-war House Democrats to visit Iraq in 2002. News reports were careful to point out that David Bonior of Michigan (who has since retired from Congress), Jim McDermott of Washington State, and Mike Thompson of California aren't accused of any crime. But their jaunt was a reckless example of freelance diplomacy performed in the service of a foreign adversary. According to an indictment, Iraqi intelligence paid Muthanna al-Hanooti, a naturalized U.S. citizen, to arrange the trip. The pols have said that if they had known who was sponsoring their excursion, they wouldn't have gone on it. Yet they've demonstrated little remorse. Bonior even told the *Detroit News* that he's "very proud" to have toured Iraq. He certainly made himself useful.

■ Saddam Hussein's Iraq cooperated with jihadist groups, including al-Qaeda affiliates. So concludes the Iraqi Perspectives Project, a Pentagon-commissioned analysis based on 600,000 documents captured by coalition forces since the March 2003 invasion. Why then do the mainstream media report, essentially, that the study found no indication of an operational relationship between Saddam's regime and al-Qaeda? In small compass, it is the story of the war: Members of the intelligence community who are opposed to administration policy selectively leak a misleading version of the evidence to like-minded journalists; they, in turn, breathlessly announce that the war's justification has been further refuted; and the administration, afraid of reopening the intelligence debate, fails to defend itself. Thus the substance of this report is dismissed, even though it proves that Saddam plotted terrorism against the West, trained thousands of non-Iraqi jihadists, and conspired with such Qaeda confederates as Egyptian Islamic Jihad (run by bin Laden's number two, Ayman Zawahiri), Ansar al-Islam in Iraq, and the Army of Mohammed in Bahrain, as well as with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a strongman in Afghanistan. Americans who have fought and died in this righteous cause deserve better.

■ In a five-minute puppet drama aired on Hamas TV in the Gaza Strip, a little Palestinian boy confronts President Bush. "You killed Daddy in Iraq," sobs the lad. "You and the criminal Zionists killed her [my mother] in Lebanon." The boy then forbids Bush to enter the White House, "because it has been turned into a great mosque for the nation of Islam." Whimpers the abject Bush: "I repent! Just don't kill me." His pleas are futile: The vengeful minor hacks him to death with the Sword of the Prophet. At about the same time this was being aired to Palestinian children, our secretary of state, at a news conference in Amman, Jordan, was expressing her optimism that Middle East peace talks are "moving in the right direction." Will someone please tell Hamas?

■ The PR debacle of the Beijing Olympics deepens and deepens. The world tour of the Olympic torch is to be shadowed by pro-Tibetan demonstrators. Meanwhile, German chancellor Angela Merkel became the third leader to announce that she would not attend the games' opening ceremonies in August; Polish prime minister Donald Tusk and Czech president Václav Klaus had bowed out earlier. Klaus blamed a scheduled surgery, but he may also share the motives of Merkel and Tusk, just as he shares their experience: All three grew up under Communism. For most of the world the cause of Tibet is idealistic, even New Age. But Eastern Europeans, like Tibetans, know what it is like to be squatted upon by a scientific-socialist hegemon. It gives "the agony of defeat" a whole new meaning.

VALERIE KUYPERS/AFP

■ Geert Wilders, an anti-immigration Dutch politician, put together a 15-minute film, *Fitna* (Arabic for "ordeal" or "civil strife"), on the unpeaceful nature of the religion of peace. Shots of imams making bloodthirsty statements are intercut with bloody footage of victims of jihadist and sharia enforcers. The Dutch government denounced the film, though it pointed out that Holland guarantees freedom of speech. Internet service providers, for whom speech is a business, backed and filled: Network Solutions took *Fitna* down in response to complaints; LiveLeak took it down, citing "threats," then posted it again after upgrading their security. Wilders is a provocateur, and his film is provoking. Media outlets are responsible for the safety of their employees. But people who want sharia have a choice of many hellholes to live in. Free people should not accept silence enforced by thuggery. Media professionals have their own responsibilities, to freedom and truth. We also serve who only sit and write.

■ During Easter vigil at St. Peter's Basilica, Pope Benedict XVI received Magdi Allam, an Egyptian-born Italian journalist, into the Catholic Church. Allam, a non-practicing Muslim, had become a critic of suicide bombers and a defender of Israel;

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THE WEEK...

most recently he decided that Islam was "inherent[ly] . . . violent and historically conflictive." Italian journalists, all of whom seem to know Allam and have an opinion of him, played it as a sensation. The Pope, however, is playing a very long game. His Regensburg address in 2006 asserted the necessary melding of faith and reason; Islam, despite its quorum of philosophers, asserts the arbitrary and unbounded will of God. In a Europe of liberal confusion and Christian demographic decline, Benedict addresses the individual mind. The shy scholar may be the Pope for this time, as John Paul II was the Pope for the endgame of Communism.

■ In the course of pursuing terrorists, Colombian forces have made some interesting finds: 66 pounds of uranium and three laptop computers, all belonging to the Marxist crime syndicate known by its Spanish acronym, "FARC." The destination of the uranium remains a mystery: FARC may have been planning to build a "dirty bomb" for its own use, or to sell the material to another organization for the same purpose. The laptops have divulged a fascinating trove of information, detailing links between the president of Ecuador, Rafael Correa, and the terrorist group, including a $20,000 FARC donation to his election campaign. FARC and Correa share a patron in Caracas: Hugo Chávez. Documents found on the computers suggest that Chávez has put $300 million and a cache of arms at FARC's disposal. The prospect of well-funded anti-American terrorists armed with radiological weapons is fearsome; FARC and Chávez should be put on notice. *¿Cómo se dice* "We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them" *en español?*

■ As we write, the results of Zimbabwe's March 29 election are still uncertain. There is good circumstantial evidence that nation-wrecker Robert Mugabe's party was easily defeated by that of his main rival, Morgan Tsvangirai. But as Stalin is supposed to have said, "those who cast the votes decide nothing; those who count the votes decide everything." Too many of Zimbabwe's votes are being counted by Mugabe-appointed officials. The possibilities, in descending order of likelihood, are: Mugabe rigs the result and declares victory (see "Kenya"); neither man wins the 50 percent plus one required by Zimbabwe's constitution, leading to a runoff election; or Tsvangirai wins outright and Mugabe steps down. More of Mugabe will mean further ruin for a ruined nation. A Tsvangirai victory will bring calls for reconstruction aid from the First World. No result will bring prosperity and tranquility to Zimbabwe anytime soon.

■ The French may have a reputation for avoiding military confrontation, but recently Nicolas Sarkozy expressed a willingness to stand up to radical Islam: He pledged to send additional French soldiers (reports suggest that the number will be 1,000) to NATO's efforts in Afghanistan. Most likely, the troops will head to the eastern part of the country, freeing up Americans to fight in the more dangerous south, according to the *Times* of London. Even this move faces significant opposition at home, to some degree in Sarkozy's own party, so the leader has earned our respect for his seriousness in facing this threat.

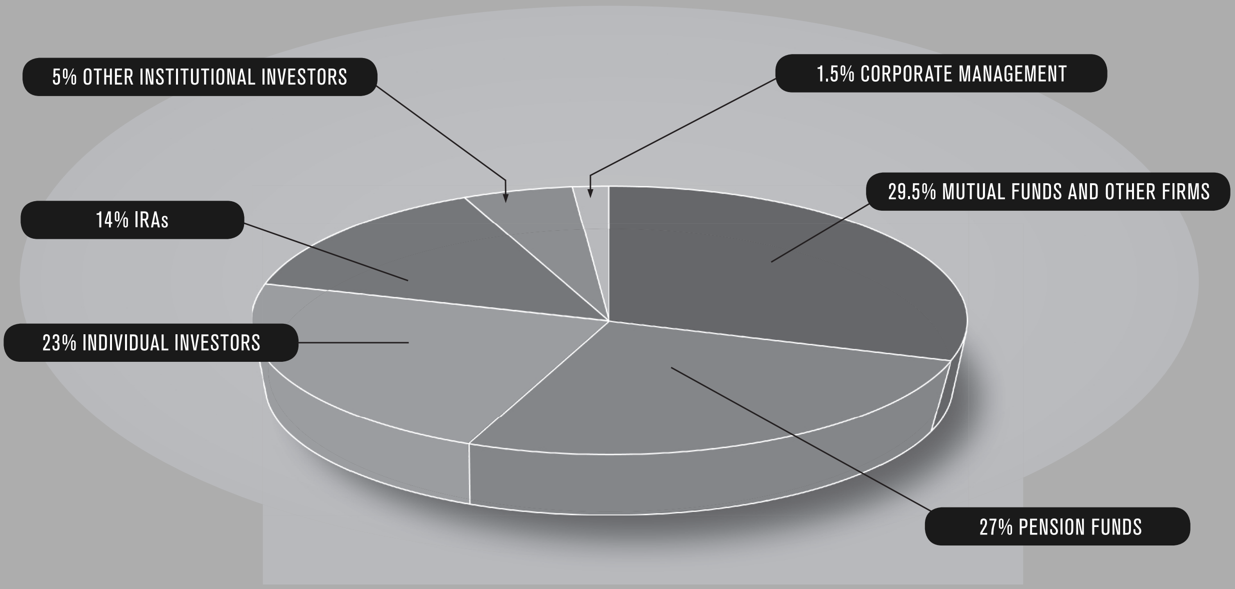
■ Sarkozy's two-day visit to Britain went off exceptionally well, leading the more serious kind of British commentator to talk of a new *Entente cordiale*. Less serious commentators divided into the cynical and the frivolous. The cynical faction noted that Sarkozy's plans to Thatcherize his nation are stalled, with socialists making great gains in recent local elections, so that it must have been a relief for him to get away. The frivolous folk concentrated on the president's ex-supermodel wife, Carla, who traveled with him. Much sport was had with the difference in height between the two, and with the contrast between 5'5" Nicolas's Cuban heels and 5'9" Carla's flat ballet pumps (by Christian Dior, *naturellement*). Sarkozy met the 5'4" Queen and her 6'2" consort, the Duke of Edinburgh. He transacted useful business with the 5'11" prime minister, Gordon Brown. He also gave a speech to Parliament, hilariously sent up by one radio comedian as a school French lesson. *Sarkozy:* "Bonjour, Mesdames et Messieurs." *Parliament, in ragged unison:* "Bon-jour, Mon-sieur le Pré-si-dent . . ." All good fun, but it remains to be seen which will have more success: Brown's plans to make Britain more French, or Sarkozy's to make France more Anglo-Saxon.

■ It is an old theme, coming up again and again: If Middle Eastern elites believe or peddle bizarre or hateful stuff, what chance does the man on the street have? The other day, Abdullah al-Ashaal went on TV. He is not your typical rabble-rouser kook. He was deputy foreign minister of Egypt, no less. And he is now professor of international law and political science at the American University in Cairo. He told his viewers that 9/11 was cooked up by Bush and Sharon. And then Sharon fell into a coma—which relieved Bush, because Sharon is a bit of a loose cannon. And now Bush worries that Sharon will wake up from the coma and expose the whole plot. Bear in mind that Egypt is a moderate Arab state and longtime ally of the United States. And this man was deputy foreign minister. The prevalence of this kind of thinking is one of the most discouraging facts about the Middle East, a discouraging region.

■ Christopher Hitchens took a swing at the Rev. Jeremiah Wright and his recently conflicted acolyte, Barack Obama. As he usually does, he swung hard. Wright's dicta are "wicked and stupid and false," and Obama's "smooth apologetics" are "untrustworthy and unscrupulous." Then he moved on, as he usually does, to the crimes and follies of Christianity in general. What is the modern font of "hatred"? "If you answered 'the churches' and 'the pulpits,' you got both answers right." Didn't Hitchens use to admire Lenin and Trotsky, the crackpot intellectual mass-murderers? Comrade Hitchens could show a little self-knowledge, and a little contrition when he snuffles out the sources of hatred in modern life.

ZUMA

[Do you own an oil company?]



U.S. Oil and Natural Gas Company Ownership, 2007

If you own mutual funds or a retirement account, chances are you're among the tens of millions of Americans with a stake in the oil and natural gas industry. A recent study* by economist and former Clinton Administration official Robert Shapiro found the majority of oil and natural gas company shareholders are "middle-class U.S. households with mutual fund investments, pension accounts or other retirement accounts and small portfolios."

So when Congress starts talking about raising energy taxes or taking "excess profits" from U.S. oil companies, look at the facts and ask yourself, "who does that really hurt?" Read the full study at EnergyTomorrow.org.

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*SONECON: *The Distribution of Ownership of U.S. Oil and Natural Gas Companies*, September 2007

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THE WEEK...

■ Wright has made a timely retirement from his ministry. Since his church emphasizes—we quote from its website—a “black value system” with a “commitment to the black community” and a “disavowal of the pursuit of ‘middleclassness,’” you would expect the reverend to have retired to a working-class black neighborhood. Not so. Wright’s new pad is to be a 10,340-square-foot house, which is currently under construction as part of a gated community in Chicago’s Tinley Park. The house is costing him—or to be precise, his congregants, since it was purchased in his church’s name—around $1.6 million. Surely it is in a black neighborhood, at least? No: Tinley Park is described on City-Data.com as less than 2 percent black. Rumors that Wright’s parting sermon bore the title “Stay Here in the Ghetto, Suckers” seem to be unfounded.

■ Google went “dark”—but did it matter? With its famous slogan, “Don’t Be Evil,” the company has worked hard to portray itself as the warm-and-cuddly techno-juggernaut, the anti-Microsoft, and its participation in “Earth Hour” is a triumph of flackery over substance. By changing its page from white to black, Google intended to spotlight a campaign to persuade people to turn their lights out for an hour. But it may have used *more* electricity by darkening its page. Google’s real dark side, however, is that it trims its electric bills by pilfering from the taxpayers’ pockets, as when it negotiated for concessionary electric rates from a government agency in Oregon, or when it got North Carolina to exempt it from state sales taxes on electricity. Taxpayer-funded handouts for billionaires? Check that motto.

■ In 2005 Joey Vento, a grandson of immigrants who owns Geno’s, a cheese-steak purveyor in Philadelphia, put up a sign that said: “This is America—When Ordering Please Speak English.” The Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations filed a complaint, claiming the sign might make “certain groups of people feel their patronage is unwelcome.” A sensible response would have been to say, “You don’t like it, go to Pat’s” (the competition), or else to realize that Geno’s will not prosper by alienating its immigrant-heavy neighborhood. Instead, as the spirit of Benjamin Franklin no doubt looked down in bemusement, Philadelphia’s placard police spent nearly two years investigating the case, consuming hundreds of hours of lawyers’ time before finally deciding last month, by a 2–1 vote, that Geno’s will be allowed to keep its sign. Proclaim liberty throughout the land!

■ Dith Pran worked as an interpreter and photographer with *New York Times* reporter Sydney Schanberg in Cambodia in the early Seventies. When the Khmer Rouge triumphed, Schanberg went home, but Pran spent four and a half years scrambling to avoid death (he had to hide his knowledge of English and his photographic skills, either of which would have merited summary execution). He finally trekked to safety in Thailand. Schanberg wrote an article about him, which got made into a movie, *The Killing Fields*. Pran symbolized and spoke for the victims of genocide, a kind of living Anne Frank. Beginning in 1980 he worked for the *Times* in the New York area, covering his share of news events, but also shooting scenes of ordinary existence—families raking leaves, tourists posing in front of the New York skyline. The hellish ordeal and the unlikely calm made his a typical 20th-century life. R.I.P.

■ In April 1942, Jacob DeShazer was a bombardier in the Doolittle raid over Japan. With four other crewmen, he bailed out. Two of them were executed. The others spent the rest of the war—three years and four months—in prison camps. They were beaten, tortured, and starved. At some point, DeShazer asked for a Bible. They brought him one, allowing him to keep it for three weeks. “I eagerly began to read its pages,” he later wrote. “I discovered that God had given me new spiritual eyes and that when I looked at the enemy officers and guards who had starved and beaten my companions and me so cruelly, I found my bitter hatred for them changed to loving pity.” He survived, and dedicated his life to missionary work in Japan. One of his converts was Mitsuo Fuchida—the lead pilot in the Pearl Harbor attack. Fuchida became an evangelist. Jacob DeShazer died in Salem, Ore., age 95. R.I.P.

AT WAR

Maliki’s Surge

IRAQI prime minister Nouri al-Maliki launched an operation against the “criminal elements” of Moqtada al-Sadr’s Mahdi Army in Basra. It has played in the American press—as so many events in Iraq do—as a blow to the United States. At first, it was said that Maliki’s offensive endangered all the security gains of the last year. Then, when Sadr pulled his fighters off the street after murky negotiations with Maliki’s representatives, that Maliki had lost the battle.

Viewed from the perspective of recent Iraqi history, Maliki’s turn against Sadr is an extraordinary and welcome development. It used to be that Maliki blocked U.S. forces from taking on Sadr’s militia in Baghdad, and it was a plausible fear that Sadr would take over Iraqi security forces from within. Now, Iraqi security forces have been directly battling elements of Sadr’s army, and Maliki compares Shiite “gangs” to al-Qaeda: “It’s unfortunate that we used to say these very words about al-Qaeda, when all the while, there were people among us who are worse than al-Qaeda.”

Unfortunately, Maliki’s drive into Basra was precipitous, and Iraqi forces encountered stiffer resistance than they were prepared for. He overpromised. There was no way his demand that all militia fighters turn in their weapons would ever be met. But the Iraqi forces performed creditably. The Iraqis independently massed 30,000 troops in the city and, with our help, inflicted damage on Sadr, both in Basra and in Sadr City in Baghdad. It

[The price at the pump]

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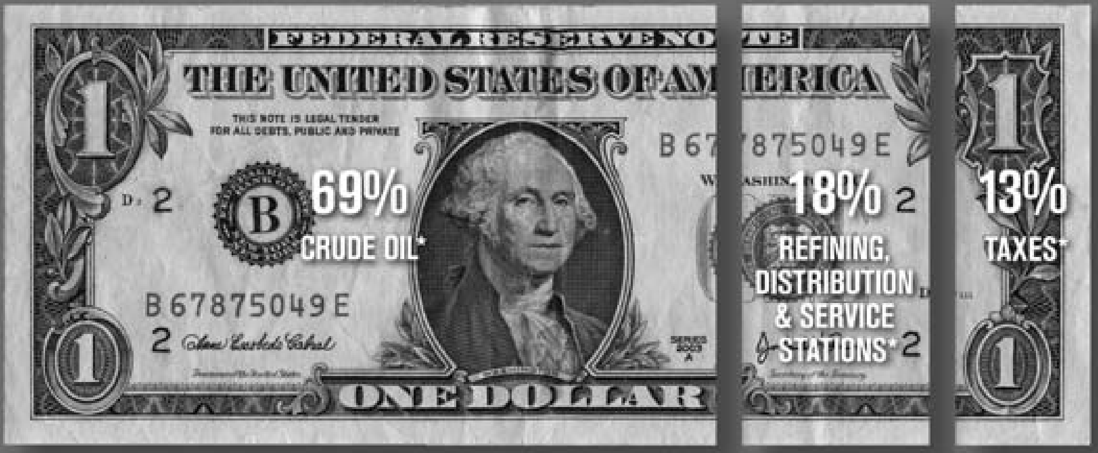

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was Sadr who told his forces to stand down, and they ceded the streets to Iraqi military units.

The backdrop for these events is the shameful British abdication in Basra. Cutting a deal with Sadr, the British evacuated the city last year and repaired to their air base outside the city, where they have been routinely attacked with rockets and done nothing about it. Not content simply to retreat from Basra, the British dissembled about the consequence of their exit. They insisted that things were fine—even as militias battled for control of the city's resources and the Iranians steadily increased their influence.

What the British effected in Basra was a version of the Democrats' preferred strategy of a premature withdrawal, which rests on the premise that Iraqis can sort things out themselves. Since the Iraqi government is still weak (as it will be for some time), this sorting out will consist of a competition between armed groups, with the Iranians likely benefiting. Although the Brits were content to look the other way, the Iraqi government wasn't.

Were Maliki's motives completely pure? Of course not. Sadr threatens to perform well in the October 1 provincial elections at the expense of Maliki's Dawa party and the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council with which it is allied. But with al-Qaeda on the run and much of the Sunni insurgency suppressed, Iran and its most dangerous catspaw—Sadr—are the greatest threat to the country's future.

It's important that Maliki appears to have committed himself to fighting them. If the Battle of Basra—and the larger fight against Sadr—has been aborted for now, it will have to be fought eventually. And Maliki must win.

THE ECONOMY

New Rules

THE Federal Reserve's intervention to save Bear Stearns looks worse as time passes. The Fed helped JPMorgan buy Bear Stearns. But then it started offering credit to other brokerage houses. If that was the right thing to do, shouldn't the Fed have helped Bear Stearns directly? And if taxpayers are to be made liable for investment firms' mistakes, shouldn't those firms have to be more heavily regulated?

Treasury secretary Henry Paulson is trying to offer a coherent response to the question of what needs to be regulated, and how. His proposal has been on the drawing board for a year; it was not designed to address this month's headlines. A good thing, too, since a proposal designed to chase the news would in all likelihood be an overreaction to that news. (See: Sarbanes-Oxley.)

Paulson would regulate less in some areas and more in others, always with a view toward modernizing a legal apparatus that largely dates from the 1930s. It calls, among other things, for more regulation of mortgage originators, which may be sensible in light of the experience of the last few years. (On the other hand, financial institutions will presumably no longer be as quick to buy packages of flaky mortgages from these originators, so the market may be fixing the problem.)

Some conservatives may balk at the way the plan treats insurance companies. It would allow them to choose to be regulated by the federal government rather than by states. This "optional federal charter" seems to us to be a wise attempt to free up interstate commerce. National companies shouldn't have to comply with 50 sets of regulations. State regulators, and local insurance companies that do not want national competition, are already crying foul, which commends the proposal to us all the more.

Democrats say the proposal is DOA on the Hill. Paulson concedes that our financial regulations cannot be overhauled in an election year. Modernization will be the work of future Congresses. By then, let's hope, the present turmoil will be a faint memory.

POLITICS

A Trap for Barack

BARACK OBAMA'S 20 years of sitting in the pews of Jeremiah Wright, the racist reverend, has not injured him fatally with the Democratic base. The emollient rhetoric of his Philadelphia speech on race most impressed those who were most willing to be mollified. The hit he took among reddish Democrats who will vote in upcoming contests in Pennsylvania, Indiana, West Virginia, and Kentucky has been matched, perhaps exceeded, by the hit Hillary sustained from her imaginary sniper fire.

Obama can hardly fare so well among Republicans, independents, and Reagan Democrats when the alternative is a solid American (both ordinary and heroic) like John McCain. Obama's great oration was like a puzzle asking a child to find the hidden figure in a drawing. For this puzzle, the question was, Where's Obama? The candidate talked about America's problems, when what America wanted was to know more about a possible president. Candidate Obama was as ungracious as he is elusive, making his still-living grandmother an object lesson in white racism. A healer should not begin his work by trashing his family.

The Obama campaign can go on in two directions, neither of them attractive. He can offer to transcend the racial questions that his own years of misjudgment stirred up by inviting America to turn left. Angry blacks and angry whites can turn to the government for solace and handouts. There is some promise here in a softening economy. But are things really that grim? Are the Joads piling into their jalopies?

If Obama offers to lead a conversation on race, he is sunk. Everyone knows that such conversations—Bill Clinton announced one in the Nineties—are monologues by aggrieved blacks addressed to their white yes-men. That's why Alice Walker and her like want one, and why no one else does. Obama the Discussion Leader would become another race hustler, like Jesse Jackson, only smoother and nicer. This is not a recipe for winning 270 electoral votes. Drop it, Barack, while you still can.

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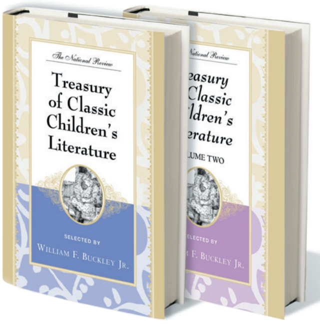
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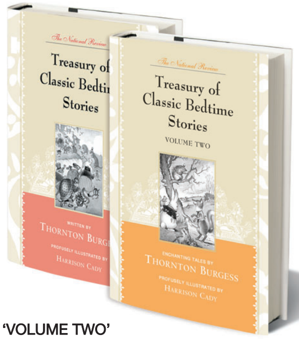
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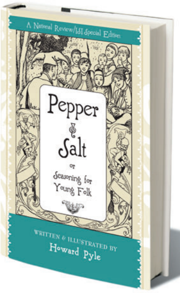
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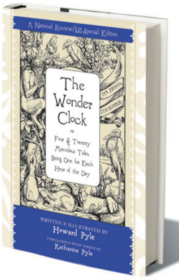
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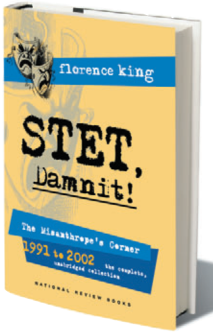
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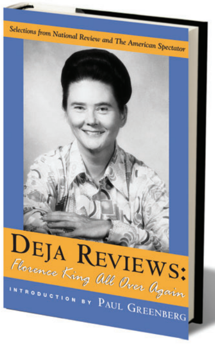
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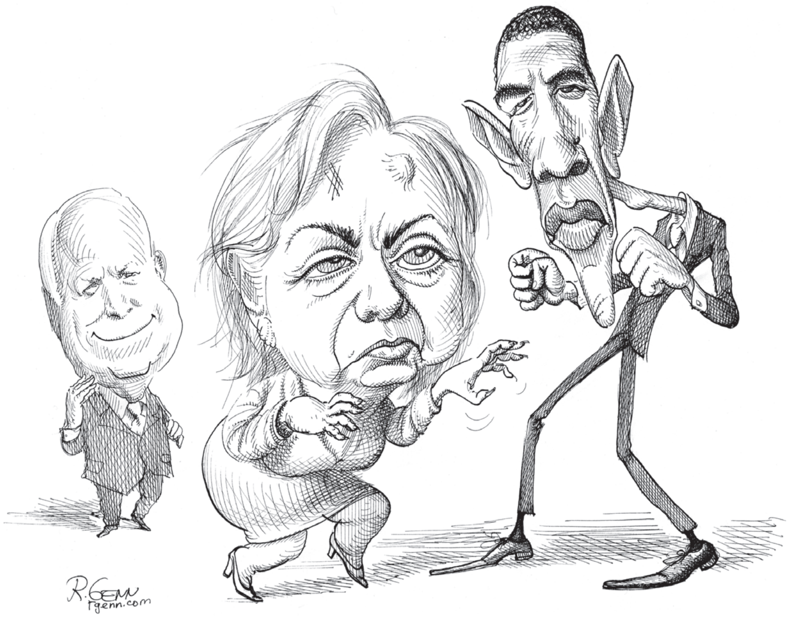

ROMAN GENN

■ 2008 ■

Cursed?

Not exactly—but neither are the Democrats blessed this primary season

NOEMIE EMERY

BETWEEN mid-2005 and mid-2007, God loved the Democrats, tossing them treat after treat in rapid succession. Hurricane Katrina, the Iraqi implosion, the Scooter Libby conviction, and of course scandal upon riotous scandal: Jack Abramoff, Duke Cunningham, Tom DeLay, Mark Foley, Larry Craig. Then, as 2008 approached, things started to change. The surge worked, Bush outwitted his critics in the House and Senate, and the Democrats began to suffer the same tricks of fate that had heretofore crippled their foes.

The stage seemed set for a moderate Democrat to win the nomination, but the party had been too loyal to its left wing in the years it was riding high. In 2006, angrier at "traitors" than at Bush and Cheney, liberal Democrats had funded a massive assault on Joe Lieberman, whose sin was to support the war. They won in the primary, but lost when he was returned to office with support from Republicans and independents. He now classifies himself as an Independent and has become inseparable from his friend John McCain.

Noemie Emery, a contributing editor to *The Weekly Standard*, is the author of *Great Expectations: The Troubled Lives of Political Families*.

The real victims, besides Ned Lamont, were the Democrats' moderate presidential hopefuls, who decided resistance was futile (at least in the primaries) and bowed out. When they did, they made sure that their party's candidate field would range from the Left to the far Left, and be dominated by politicians from the bluest states. Ever since 1964, when Lyndon Johnson swept to his post-JFK landslide, the successful Democratic presidential candidates have been governors from the South or the cultural heartland. These candidates have typically distanced themselves from the far Left, at least during their campaigns.

Two leading figures of the party's dwindling moderate faction, Evan Bayh and Mark Warner, called off their presidential bids before 2006 was over. Both were from border states, had been governors, and had shown crossover appeal in red-leaning country, attracting people who wanted a change—but perhaps not much of one—from Republican governance. This was important because, though the Republican brand had been damaged, most polls still showed conservatives outnumbering liberals by three to two, and earlier this year only 18 percent of Americans favored the immediate pullout of troops from Iraq. The left-wing activists, who wanted more than anything to unseat the Republicans, had scared off the people most likely to help them. So even before God stopped loving the Democrats, they had pitched themselves Strike One.

At the time this did not appear critical, as Hillary Clinton seemed poised to glide to her coronation, all but untested by real competition. She then would be free to start tacking back toward the center for her general-election campaign. She apparently made no plans to fight Democrats past Super Tuesday (February 5). Who could displace the one-time first lady, a historic and trail-blazing figure, running to shatter the highest glass ceiling of all, helped by her husband, the master fundraiser and strategist?

No one, it turned out, but Barack Obama, who appears to be a sort of divine missile, handcrafted in heaven for the purpose of breaking the Clintons' long hold on their party. If Bill Clinton was hailed as the first black president, Obama promised to be the genuine article. If she promised to bring historic change to the land's highest office, he offered still more change, and change still more important, given the country's history of slavery and segregation.

He stole her black vote, her change mantra, and her good name by bringing out the Clintons' worst aspects. He goaded them into playing the race card in South Carolina, and into using every underhanded tactic the press and the liberals had excused when deployed against conservatives. Millions of Democrats will never feel the same way about their ex-leader, the most successful Democrat of the last half century and their first two-term president since 1945. If she fails to win, which seems likely, the Clintons' joint reputation will not recover. The party's first couple has been pushed off its pedestal. Call this Strike Two.

If Barack Obama was the worst thing that could have befallen the Clintons, Obama's very own pastor and friend was the worst thing that could have befallen him. The news that the transcendent (and transracial) candidate, who based his campaign on the promise of healing, had spent 20 years or so in the congregation of the Rev. Jeremiah Wright—who called his country the "US of KKK A," referred to Jesus's crucifixion as a plot by Jews and Italians, railed against Israel, called Italians "garlic noses," and once urged his flock to sing "God damn America"—came as a shock. "This is somebody who was preaching three sermons at least a week for 30 years," Obama explained, or tried to. "They found five or six of his most offensive statements, boiled that down into a . . . half-minute sound clip, and just played it over and over again."

Perhaps. But three little words—"nappy-headed hos"—were enough to bring the wrath of God down on Don Imus, who in his career had done hundreds of serious interviews and raised large sums of money for charity. One little word—"macaca"—was enough to cost George Allen his Senate seat and the GOP its control of that body. A few words in praise of Strom Thurmond cost Trent Lott his place in the party leadership. When George W. Bush made one speech at Bob Jones University, he was pressed to denounce the school's past and its policies. A white candidate who listened to a white pastor denounce blacks would of course be finished, as would a Catholic who listened to a priest denounce Jews and Protestants, a Protestant who listened to a pastor denounce Jews and Catholics, or a Jew who listened to a rabbi rail against Christians in general.

Obama's fans in the press, and his liberal base, will insist that this case is "different," but Middle America is unlikely to share that perspective, and worse things may be yet to come. University of Chicago professor Charles Lipson writes on RealClearPolitics.com about four ticking time bombs waiting to derail the candidate. Among them are the bribery trial of his benefactor Antoin "Tony" Rezko and his ties to another political fixer, Illinois-senate head Emil Jones. A third problem, according to Lipson, comes again from the pulpit: "Videos have now surfaced of virulent race-baiting by yet another Chicago preacher with ties to Obama, the Rev. James Meeks. . . . Meeks's sermons have called white mayors 'slave masters' and denigrated moderate black politicians. . . . If close ties between Meeks and Obama are discovered, the problems caused by Rev. Wright will come blazing back."

A fourth problem is Obama's 1995 visit to Bill Ayers and Bernardine Dohrn, who were leading figures in the Weathermen, a far-left '60s terrorist group. The husband and wife have not disowned their actions. Rather the opposite. "I don't regret setting bombs; I feel we didn't do enough," Ayers told the *New York Times* in an interview that fortuitously appeared on Tuesday, September 11, 2001.

Shall we call all this Strike Three?

And so the Democrats in 2008 find themselves with two battered liberals at the head of their party. The bad news about Barack Obama is coming out just as he has made himself the all-but-inevitable nominee, so the party faces two potential problems. If the emerging web of connections to Wright, Ayers, and Rezko does not alienate the Democratic electorate (or does not reach it in time to make much of a difference), the party could nominate a man who will lose independents and conservative Democrats to John McCain in November.

Alternatively, these problems may resonate with enough conservative Democrats to revive the struggling campaign of Hillary Clinton, help her win Pennsylvania and a clutch of late primaries, and send her into the Denver convention on the crest of a moderate surge. Then, says the Associated Press's Charles Babington, the party leaders will be caught in a vise, forced to decide "between a wounded Obama and a surging Clinton whose success was built on tearing down the party's front-runner." Choosing Clinton could anger "Obama's supporters, especially blacks, the Democratic Party's most loyal base."

Not what the Democrats expected back in 2006, when they were cruising to victory. Does God hate the Democrats? Probably not—they retain significant advantages, including low approval ratings for Bush and an edge in party identification. But perhaps God does love John McCain. **NR**

■ **2008 II**

A Kind of Dynamite

Obama, McCain, and the politics of race

BYRON YORK

In 2004, George W. Bush pulled off something of a miracle in Ohio. It wasn't just that he won the state, which sealed his victory over John Kerry. It was that he won with 16 percent of the black vote. For a Republican, that's huge. For a Democrat, Kerry's 84 percent was an embarrassment.

There's no doubt that Ohio will be a key state in this year's general election, too; no Republican has been elected president without it. But don't look for John McCain to replicate Bush's 16 percent landslide. For one thing, there will be no amendment to ban gay marriage—a measure that won heavy black support and more black votes for Bush—on the ballot. For another thing, it's looking more and more like Barack Obama *will* be on the ballot. That probably means McCain will be lucky to get 8 percent of the black vote in Ohio, and he might get even less. And that means Ohio will be even more in play than in the past.

It's not just Ohio, either. Virginia, which Bush won in 2004 with 12 percent of the black vote, might well be open for Obama's taking, too. And Missouri, which Bush won with 10 percent of the black vote, could also be a problem for Republicans. The same may be true of Arkansas, or Tennessee. "If Obama is able to maintain white support, then an increase in the black vote could throw those states into the swing area," says Democratic strategist Donna Brazile, who ran Al Gore's 2000 campaign. Ohio, Virginia, Missouri, Arkansas, Tennessee; it will be hard for McCain if he can't win a bunch of those states.

Nationally, Gore won 90 percent of the black vote in 2000. In 2004, Kerry won 88 percent. One might think that those totals couldn't go much higher; blacks are nearly maxed out on Democrats. But with

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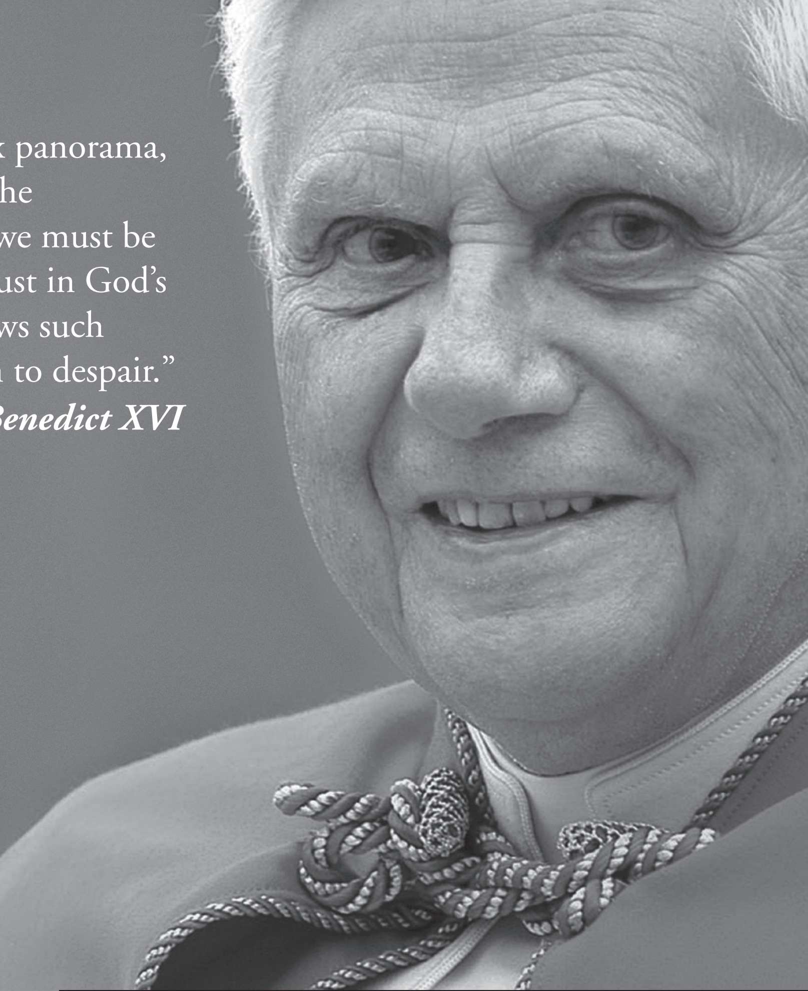
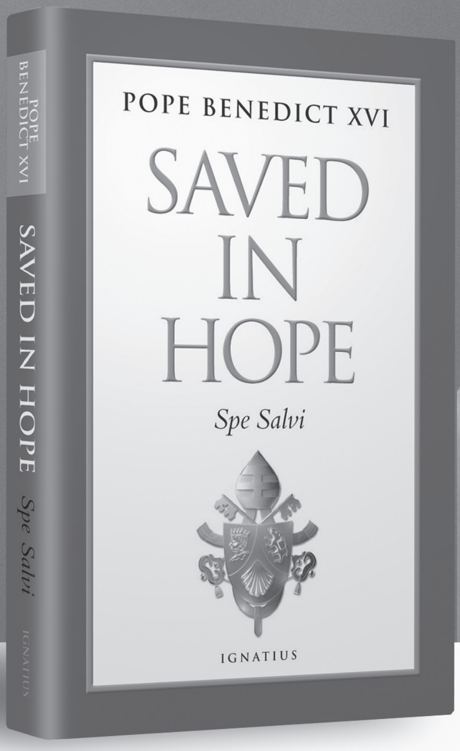
— ***Pope Benedict XVI***





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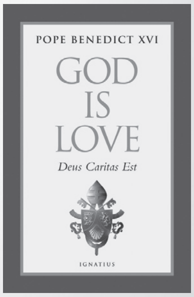

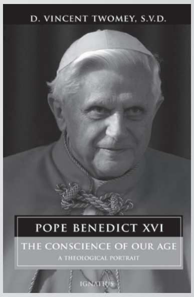

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Obama? “I could see him getting 94 percent,” says David Bositis, who has studied black voting for years as the senior political analyst at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. “The previous high was 94 percent, which is what Lyndon Johnson got in 1964, with a much smaller black vote.”

This time it will likely be much bigger. In 2000, blacks made up 10 percent of the 105 million people who turned out to vote. In 2004, they made up 11 percent of the 121 million people who turned out to vote. A number of observers think Obama’s appeal could add another percentage point to that, with blacks making up perhaps 12 percent of an even bigger electorate this time around. The bottom line: more blacks voting, and more of them voting for the Democratic candidate.

It’s not exactly a Republican strategist’s dream scenario. “It’s just math,” says GOP consultant Tucker Eskew. “Just look at states that are not completely reliably Republican and have substantial black populations. In a year with a climate that favors Democratic positions, this should be taken very seriously.”

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Republicans are getting a preview in the Democratic race. As late as last fall, opinion polls showed Hillary Clinton actually leading Obama among black Democrats. Then, as the prospect of voting neared, black support began to move toward Obama. The first state with a significant black population to vote was South Carolina, where Obama won 78 percent to Clinton’s 19 percent. (John Edwards got 2 percent.) Then, the deluge: Obama won 92 percent of the black vote in Mississippi, 91 percent in Wisconsin, 87 percent in Ohio, 84 percent in Maryland, and 84 percent in Texas. And that was against a fellow Democrat with whom he had few serious policy differences.

The radical tag that came from the Wright affair could morph into a larger issue of patriotism.

So it’s probably safe to say McCain can forget about making much progress with black voters. And the job might be a little tougher for him than it would have been for any other GOP candidate. So far, McCain has shown no interest in rough-and-tumble campaigning against Obama—he has distanced himself from supporters who made even modest mention of the Rev. Jeremiah Wright or referred to Obama by his full name, “Barack Hussein Obama.” And on top of that, McCain, unlike the old “compassionate conservative”–era George W. Bush, has no real connection to the black world. “Texas has the third-biggest black population in the country,” Bositis says, referring to the number of blacks in the state, not their percentage of the population. “I knew some black Republicans in Texas who would tell me what a good guy Bush was. At least by word of mouth, he had some black supporters who were willing to vouch for him. But I don’t think McCain has any. Not that he has anything in his record that’s a problem, but he comes from one of the whitest states in the country.”

The question for strategists of both parties is whether a large black turnout for Obama will result in a higher white turnout as well—and, if it does, whether that increased white turnout will be pro-Obama or anti-Obama. No one wants to suggest that either black or white voters would vote along racial lines. They’ll say the real issue is class, or culture, or some other factor. And no one wants to even hint that the campaigns might make racial appeals. “The McCain campaign realizes that racial politics is dynamite,” says Eskew. “It is dynamite that unfairly blows up on Republicans more than Democrats, and you see among most Republicans, and definitely the RNC and the McCain campaign, a real sensitivity about touching this particular third rail.”

But racially tinged issues are bound to come up in the campaign. Certainly Republican strategists were happy to see the controversy over Wright, because it raised the possibility that Obama was not quite what he had so far seemed in the campaign: that he was perhaps less a post-racial agent of hope than a radical. Republicans were happy not only because it exposed an Obama weak spot, but also because Republicans didn’t do the exposing. Instead, Hillary and Bill Clinton got the blame.

Indeed, to the degree race has entered the race, it has been the work of the Clintons. When they seemed to stress Obama’s race, in South Carolina, it backfired on them. But the radical tag that came from the Wright affair, while racially tinged, could morph into a larger issue of Obama’s patriotism, which could hurt him even if McCain never focuses on it. “McCain is going to have to hope that while the Clintons successfully made Obama the African-American candidate—a historic figure—they were equally successful in radicalizing him,” says Ken Blackwell, the former Ohio secretary of state and gubernatorial candidate. “McCain’s character will not let him go down that track. That’s good, and practically speaking, he won’t need to.”

So it’s an issue that is as touchy as it is important. And it will play out in the context of what will surely be a historic black turnout at the polls. Everybody knows that in the general election McCain will be sailing against a serious headwind on issues like Iraq and the economy. But turnout, and the racial politics that might determine it, could ultimately make McCain’s task all the more difficult. **NR**

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■ **PUBLIC POLICY**

Stealth Reform

Conservatives should not support Sen. Bob Bennett's health-care plan

RAMESH PONNURU

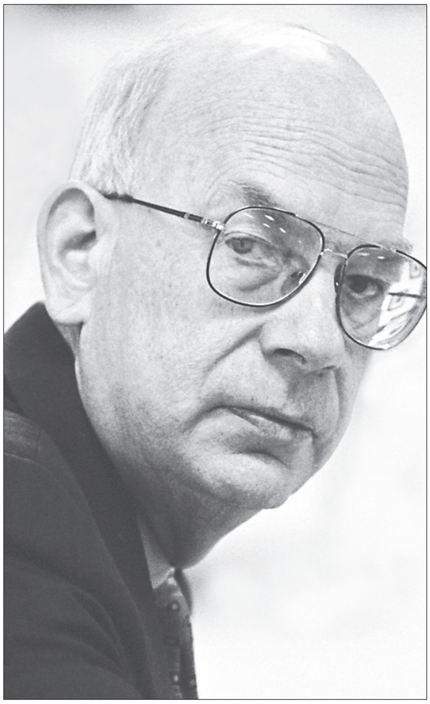
Bob Bennett, a Republican senator from Utah, has an idea. The country needs health-care reform, he thinks, and will get it only if the plan is bipartisan. He sees the possibility for a deal that provides health insurance for all through the private sector. Democrats would give up on having a "single payer," government-run system, and Republicans would accept more regulation of the insurance industry.

Guided by this idea, Bennett has become the leading Republican co-sponsor of Democrat Ron Wyden's health-care reform legislation. The two of them have been meeting one-on-one with other senators to bring them on board, and they are having some success. Seven Republican and seven Democratic senators have endorsed the legislation.

The Republicans are not the relatively liberal members of the party who often co-sponsor high-profile Democratic legislation, either. Bennett is very close to Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell. Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, another co-sponsor, is the third-ranking Senate Republican. Other co-sponsors include Judd Gregg of New Hampshire, Norm Coleman of Minnesota, and Mike Crapo of Idaho. Trent Lott of Mississippi was a co-sponsor of the legislation before he left the Senate earlier this year.

Several of the Republican co-sponsors, including Bennett, have expressed concern about the regulations in the bill. When he endorsed the legislation, Sen. Bob Corker of Tennessee said, "This bill is not perfect, but it's a great starting point for both sides of the aisle to come together around health-care reform that ensures all Americans have access to affordable, quality health insurance that is deeply rooted in the private market." These Republicans have decided that the bill makes progress, or at least that they need to be seen as doing something bipartisan about health care.

Bennett hopes that support will keep rising: "A lot of Republicans who have not signed on have come to me and said, 'We're interested, we want to be part of the conversation.' And of course that's where the co-sponsors come from." Bennett believes that the next president will be more likely to achieve a health-care reform if he adopts a plan that has already won bipartisan support in the Senate, rather than trying to enact his own plan.



The compromiser

ROLL CALL

Bennett and Wyden have promoted the plan using conservative catch phrases. "The core principle of the Healthy Americans Act," says Bennett, "is let's get away from the 1940s, paternalistic notion that an individual shouldn't control his own earnings and an individual should stay with one employer for his entire career." The act would change the tax code to break the link between employment and health insurance: Isn't that a conservative goal? It gets rid of Medicaid and S-CHIP: Isn't that beyond the dreams of conservative activists? The Lewin Group, a health-care consulting firm, estimates that the plan would reduce health spending by $1.4 trillion over ten years. Shouldn't fiscal conservatives applaud?

No. The closer you look at it, the more it appears that Bennett-Wyden is a "compromise" in which the government takes over the financing of health care but, to save face, conservatives are allowed to pretend that the private sector is still in charge. Their plan is, in important respects, to the left of the ones being offered by Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, and has been celebrated as such in liberal magazines.

The regulations in Bennett-Wyden do not merely impose limits on insurance companies. They attempt to change their business model. Insurance pools risks: You may be healthy, but you agree to pay a premium in case you get sick and need care. The business works as long as companies don't have to offer the same deal to people who are already sick. If they did, people would have an incentive to wait until they got sick to buy insurance, and premiums would explode.

Bennett-Wyden makes it illegal for insurance companies to discriminate against people based on health status. It also makes it illegal for them to charge different rates based on customers' age, sex, or occupation, although it does let them give discounts for people who do healthy things like quitting smoking. These prohibitions make insurance a rip-off for young and healthy people. The bill keeps them from opting out by forcing them, and everyone else, to buy a minimum level of insurance. (Obama shrinks from taking this step.) It also cuts the price of insurance for poor people. The Lewin Group estimates that to administer the plan and enforce this mandate, the IRS would have to expand by a quarter.

And it might not even work. The senators are probably underestimating the ingenuity of the insurance companies, who might find subtler ways to attract healthy customers and dump the sick ones. (They could pay half the cost of a gym membership, for example.) If it does work, insurance companies will no longer be pooling risks so much as they will be the government's tool for socializing costs. They would, in effect, become regulated public utilities. The government would have made it impossible for them to act as insurers, and in return provided

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By John Fleming

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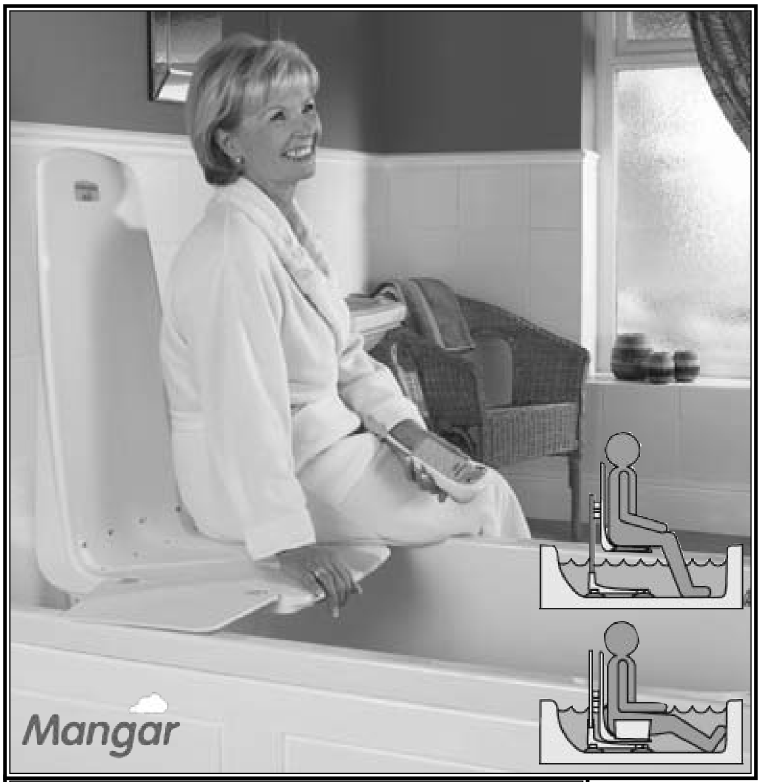

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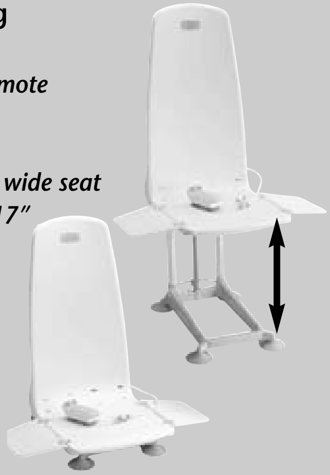

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subsidies to keep them in the business of paying claims.

Michael Cannon, a health-policy analyst at the Cato Institute, notes that the plan's progressive structure would punish people for moving up the income ladder. The withdrawal of subsidies would amount to a big increase in effective marginal tax rates. That's in addition to the plan's actual taxes, which are substantial. The Lewin Group analysis has individuals' taxes rising by $1.7 trillion over ten years (although for some people the new subsidies would offset these tax increases). Business taxes would go up by $1 trillion.

As those details suggest, it is by no means clear that the Bennett-Wyden approach to health-care reform would be popular. Most people are satisfied with their health-care arrangements, even though they also think that the system as a whole is broken. Clinton and Obama have therefore designed health-reform plans that do not directly threaten those arrangements. Under Bennett-Wyden, employer-provided insurance comes to an end even if the employees are happy with it. The bill also achieves more cost savings than Clinton's or Obama's plan would. But the Lewin estimates are based entirely on the assumption that the bill will create a new marketplace in which 70 percent of the population will be in HMOs, compared with 30 percent today. Americans probably wouldn't sit still for that.

To achieve universal coverage through the private sector, you would have to re-create the insurance industry and then prop it up.

Some of the bill's flaws, while important, are incidental to its structure. It appears to mandate that insurance companies cover abortions. While it is remarkable that pro-life politicians are co-sponsoring such a bill, this provision could, in theory, be removed. The mandates can't. Indeed, the bill's basic design is inevitable, given its ambition to achieve universal coverage through the (nominally) private sector. If that's what you want to do, you have to re-create the insurance industry and then prop it up.

Bennett has long advocated that goal. As a freshman senator he wanted to work with Bill Clinton to achieve universal coverage, until his party turned decisively against the Clinton plan. In the last year, Senate Republicans as a group have adopted the slogan "Every American Insured" to summarize what they stand for. But they have not adopted policies that would make universal coverage a reality. Short of a government takeover of health care or a mandate that everyone buy insurance, it is hard to see how they could.

One reason Republicans are embracing Bennett's bill is that they have mistaken the public's real anxieties about health care for a demand for universal coverage. Covering everyone sounds desirable to most people, but they do not seem eager to take the steps this would require. Over the last few years, however, a few Republicans have finally devised attractive conservative policies that address the public's concerns but do not force everyone to get health insurance.

One of those Republicans is John McCain. His plan has two major components. He would replace the current tax break for employer-provided health insurance with a tax credit of $2,500 for individuals or $5,000 for families. He would also make it possible for people to buy health insurance across state lines, bypassing regulations that have made insurance expensive in many states.

Many people would thus be able to buy their own insurance policies. They would be able to take those policies with them from job to job, and would no longer have to worry about what their employer, or their next one, will decide to do with their coverage. Steve Parente, a professor of finance at the University of Minnesota, estimated that an earlier version of McCain's plan, with a less generous tax credit, would help 23 to 27 million uninsured people get coverage. That means, of course, that the plan doesn't cover absolutely everyone. But it also doesn't order anyone to buy insurance, or abolish employer-based coverage by fiat.

So Republicans might be able to win the health-care debate. But first they will have to reject Bennett-Wyden, and the goal of universal coverage. **NR**

■ **CULTURE WATCH**

Liberal Web

In the Battle of Wikipedia, we must not surrender

JOHN J. MILLER

"EVERY organization should Google itself, just to see what comes up," says Bridgett Wagner of the Heritage Foundation. As it happens, a Google search for "Heritage Foundation" produces millions of links. The first two go directly to the think tank's own website. The third, however, leads to Wikipedia, the popular online encyclopedia.

This winter, Wagner was surfing around Wikipedia to see what it said about her employer. Soon she found herself reading the entry for Heritage president Edwin Feulner. "It was full of errors," she says. Some of them were relatively harmless, such as the false claim that Feulner has a sister who is a nun. A prominent section of the entry, however, carried a different cast. "The author was obviously hostile to us," she says. "It wasn't even remotely neutral."

Because Wikipedia is written and edited by the general public rather than a staff of professionals, almost anybody can alter its entries. Wagner looked into correcting the record. Today, the page on Feulner is at once more accurate and more substantial, with new and pertinent information about his family, career, and writings. There's even a photograph of him. What was once an amateur hit job now has the look and feel of what might appear in a comprehensive encyclopedia—the sort of thing Wikipedia aspires to be.

So the immediate problem of a think tank's brand management was solved. Yet the episode highlights a larger conundrum for conservatives, which is that Wikipedia brims with liberal bias—and that conservatives aren't doing enough to fight back.

Founded in 2001, Wikipedia calls itself "the free encyclopedia that anyone can edit." It has become the most influential reference site on the web. It may even be the most influential reference source avail-

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able anywhere, online or off. Its English-language edition carries more than 2.3 million articles, written by thousands of contributors who call themselves “Wikipedians.” These entries almost always rank high on Google searches. Most are on topics that have nothing to do with politics, such as black holes and fire ants. For nagging trivia questions—what is Indiana Jones’s middle name?—Wikipedia is a boon. It’s an increasingly reliable resource for general information as well. A couple of years ago, the journal *Nature* compared a sampling of scientific entries found on Wikipedia with those published in *Encyclopedia Britannica*. It determined that the newcomer was almost as trustworthy as the old hand.

Politics are another matter. They arouse more passions than photosynthesis, or at least different ones. The Pew Internet & American Life Project estimates that two years ago, during the last round of congressional elections, 25 million people “fact-checked the candidates online.” That figure is bound to rise this year, and these online investigations may influence undecided voters. Anybody who searches the Internet for information about candidates can’t avoid bumping into Wikipedia. On a Google search for “John McCain,” the Wikipedia entry comes in second—just below McCain’s presidential-campaign website and just above his Senate-office website.

McCain’s entry is locked, which means that ordinary users of Wikipedia can’t change its content. The same is true for a handful of other entries, including those on President Bush, Hillary Clinton, and Barack Obama. These are some of the most-read pages on Wikipedia, and the idea is to shield them from vandals. Only a handful of entries are protected, however. As for the rest, just about anybody can edit them, and at any time.

The most egregious examples of vandalism tend to be corrected quickly by devoted Wikipedians. It’s like the “broken windows” theory of crime—if you keep replacing the shattered windows, eventually the vandals will quit tossing rocks at them. Plenty of controversial subjects are handled with an exquisite sense of fairness, and Wikipedia provides a special forum for editors to debate each other on how best to treat topics. There are vigorous debates between “deletionists” who seek to eliminate material they consider irrelevant and “inclusionists” who believe that more information equals richer content.

As a result, Wikipedia is in a constant state of flux and improvement. In the current issue of *Education Next*, Michael Petrelli of the Fordham Foundation complains that Wikipedia’s entry on school vouchers contains an abundance of negative commentary, including the claim that vouchers encourage “taxpayer-subsidized ‘white flight’ from urban public schools.” Petrelli points out that the vast majority of students who receive vouchers in Cleveland, Milwaukee, and Washington, D.C.—the few places where private-school-choice programs actually exist—are not white. Shortly after Petrelli published this observation, a Wikipedian added it to the school-voucher entry. Anybody who reads it now will learn that the white-flight claim is empirically false. “I guess it means that Wikipedia seems to be self-correcting,” says Petrelli.

If Wikipedia’s openness is its primary strength, it’s also the website’s greatest vulnerability. In 2005, John Seigenthaler, a former journalist and Department of Justice official, learned just how far the mischief can go. His entry suggested that he was involved in the assassinations of both JFK and RFK. The editor who made the claim intended it as a prank, but it went unnoticed for about four months. With some understandable bitterness, Seigenthaler wrote about his experience in *USA Today*, and Wikipedia suffered a blow to its credibility.

A Wikipedia entry is only as good as the person who wrote it or the last person who edited it—and if that person is a liberal who isn’t committed to the Wikipedian principle of objectivity, conservatives can suffer. “I used to monitor my boss’s page,” says a former staffer to a Republican congressman. “The people who set it up were obviously on the other side.” A section on “notable stances,” for instance, included data from pro-labor and pro-abortion groups—and no alternative views. “I tried to offer some balance,” says the staffer. “I didn’t take down any of the liberal material, but I did add content from a more conservative orientation.” He became a Wikipedian, editing the entry from home or a public library.

R. Genn
rgenn.com

ROMAN GENN

He didn’t work on the page from his Capitol Hill office because others have sparked controversies for doing so. In 2006, the *Lowell* (Mass.) *Sun* revealed that the staff of former Democratic representative Marty Meehan had removed a reference to the congressman’s broken term-limit pledge. Other members of Congress have had their entries whitewashed by their employees, including Democratic senator Dianne Feinstein of California (a mention of a campaign-finance fine was expunged) and Republican senator Norm Coleman of Minnesota (who apparently didn’t want anybody to know he was a “liberal Democrat” in college). For a time, the problem was so pervasive that Wikipedia actually blocked computers with House or Senate web connections from making edits.

The burnishing was bipartisan. Yet loads of entries carry an ideological slant. Leslie Graves of the Wisconsin-based Lucy Burns Institute tracks Wikipedia coverage. “Negative information about liberals is buried, but with conservatives it’s featured prominently,” she says. “Just look at the entry for Eliot Spitzer.” The New York Democrat resigned from the governorship after news reports linked him to hookers. His biographical entry on Wikipedia chronicles his career but doesn’t get around to mentioning anything about prostitution until its sixth paragraph, even though these ties are almost certainly the one thing Americans are most likely to know about him. By contrast, the entry for Republican senator David Vitter of Louisiana points out in its first paragraph that he was identified last year as the client of a Washington, D.C., escort service. Sex scandals involving Republicans Larry Craig and Mark Foley also receive much more emphasis than Spitzer’s fall from grace. (Because Wikipedia entries are constantly updated, they may change over time; the descriptions provided here are accurate as of late March.)

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It's impossible to say whether these biases influence voters, but lots of web activists have made up their own minds. The 2006 reelection campaign of Republican senator George Allen of Virginia is a case in point. "The left-wing netroots used to advertise on blogs and elsewhere for people to post negative information about us," says Jon Henke, who was a new-media coordinator for Allen. "On Wikipedia, we got our brains beat out." Whereas the entry on Allen came to read like a compendium of opposition research, the one on Allen's Democratic opponent, Jim Webb, didn't suffer the same kind of treatment. "His profile was glowing," says Henke. In the end, Webb narrowly defeated Allen.

The problem has nothing to do with the rules governing Wikipedia. "The policy guidelines are very good and having a neutral point of view is close to a sacred rule," says one experienced editor, a conservative who has worked on political content. "Conservatives shouldn't whine about bias because they can correct it themselves."

In order to do so, however, they need manpower. "We're up against a bunch of liberals without jobs who are making these changes," says Patrick Ruffini, a GOP political consultant. So far, however, conservatives have found it difficult to respond. Last summer, David All, a Republican web strategist, tried to organize conservative Wikepedians to serve as watchdogs. "Each of the top 200 races in 2008 should have at least one volunteer responsible for monitoring Wikipedia," says All. "There are people out there who won't make phone calls or lick stamps for candidates, but who will be active online. For a campaign, this could be just as important as a traditional ground game." The effort sputtered out and All has moved on to other projects, but he still believes it's something that Republicans should try to tackle in more than an ad hoc fashion.

Traditionally, conservatives have done a good job of finding unconventional ways to communicate their ideas to the public. Excluded from the mainstream media, the Right helped invent the direct-mail business and political talk radio. On the web, a different story could be unfolding—and if conservatives don't catch up, the Wikipedia entry for "United States general elections, 2008" may include results that no amount of clever editing will rub away. **NR**

■ **THE STATES**

Live Free Or Shrug

What the Democrats have done to New Hampshire

ANDREW CLINE

In the 2006 election, New Hampshire voters did what they had not done since 1874, the year Republicans were routed nationally because of scandal and an immensely unpopular Reconstruction agenda: They handed Democrats control of every elected branch of state government. Now they are paying the price—literally. The orgy of taxing, spending, and regulating in which Democrats have indulged is threatening New Hampshire's status as the New England state most hospitable to business and individual liberty.

Immediately after taking control in January 2007, the Democratic majority began working toward a massive increase in state spending. Popular Democratic governor John Lynch proposed a huge new budget, and the legislature larded it up with even more spending. That summer, the legislature passed, and Governor Lynch signed, a $10.3 billion budget—the first New Hampshire budget to cross the $10 billion mark. Its 17.5 percent increase in state-general-fund spending, the largest in two decades, was financed with more than $100 million in tax and fee increases, including a 28-cent-per-pack cigarette-tax hike, as well as higher car- and deed-registration fees, court filing fees—even turkey-hunting license fees.

The previous state budget, passed by a Republican legislature under the same Democratic governor, had grown by only 2.28 percent over its predecessor—one of the reasons Lynch had become so popular. But without a Republican legislature in opposition, he was free to let his hair down a little. And he did, on budgetary and other issues.

Even with the massive tax increase, the $475 million in new spending was not fully funded. Legislators took care of that by simply assuming that there would be healthy increases in revenue, despite economic data that predicted a slowing economy and, therefore, declining revenue. Even before the budget was passed last summer, Republicans predicted that it would be more than $100 million out of balance by the end of the biennium in 2009.

Mr. Cline is editorial-page editor of the ***New Hampshire Union Leader****.*

Guess what? Department heads now predict a budget shortfall of about $140 million.

The governor got legislators to cut $50 million from this year's spending—targeting some of the same programs and policies (health and human services, land conservation) that Democrats had relentlessly attacked Republicans for trimming in 2006 and 2004. The Democrats are deferring the remaining $90 million (at least) in needed cuts until the second year of the biennium—which is to say, until after this fall's elections.

There is good reason to suspect that, instead of cutting spending, they will raise taxes again. Governor Lynch began the year (an election year, remember) by pledging to oppose any new spending. He refused, however, to oppose tax increases or new taxes. When asked twice on a popular public-radio talk show whether he would oppose new or increased taxes, he dodged the question both times.

The tax hikes and the laughable justifications for them continue. The very first bill approved this January was a new tax on sellers of animal vaccines. It was labeled a fee and passed under the pretense that the state veterinarian needed new revenue to cover the cost of animal-vaccine licensing. But New Hampshire does not license animal vaccines; the FDA does. The state merely processes some paperwork for about 50 vaccines a year. And not a dime of the "fee" was directed to the state veterinarian's office. The bill put all the new money into the state's spay-and-neuter program.

Next, legislators attempted to pass a tax on bottled beverages and label it a fee as well. This "fee" would have provided no service to consumers, but instead would have funded environmental programs, including startup grants for "green" companies. It was approved 15–2 in committee, but opponents were able to stop it in the state house of representatives.

Sensible Democrats did manage to kill the worst new tax proposed since their takeover. They nixed a proposal—by a British-born Democratic legislator, no less—to mandate that all candy sold in New Hampshire bear a tax stamp. Yes, the bill would have created colonial-style stamps that merchants would have had to stick on every piece of candy, in order to prove they'd paid the tax on it.

It's also true that, thanks to pressure from Lynch, legislators have not been as energetic in their pursuit of tax and spending hikes since January as they were in 2007. But after just one year with Democrats running the state, New Hampshire is operating with an unbalanced budget that spends nearly half a billion more than the previous one, and the state's residents are facing the real possibility of tax increases as large as the ones passed last summer.

The new Democratic majority has also begun crusading against personal behavior it dislikes. Last year, the legislature banned smoking in bars and restaurants statewide. The state's motto is "Live Free or Die," but Democratic lawmakers believe they have a mandate to interfere with personal behavior they find objectionable. The tough-on-smoking theme is a recurring one. A bill is moving through the legislature to redefine cigarillos as cigarettes. They are actually small cigars, but the state taxes cigarettes at a much higher rate.

And as recently as February, New Hampshire's house of representatives appeared to be on the verge of putting all the state's cigar shops out of business, with a plan to place a 60 percent tax on cigars—double the 30 percent tax imposed in Massachusetts. (The bill was referred to interim study after cigar-shop owners and the New Hampshire *Union Leader*'s editorial page pointed out that the tax, which would have applied to all inventory and not only to cigars sold, would have cost some cigar shops tens of thousands of dollars the day it went into effect, putting many of them, if not all, out of business.)

Democratic legislators' attempts to kill another industry were more successful: They passed a bill that will effectively kick payday lenders out of the state next year. The payday-lending industry had boomed in New Hampshire in the past few years, and not a single complaint had been lodged with the banking commission against any payday lender. Nonetheless, Concord decided it had to "protect" the citizenry, and placed a 36 percent cap on the interest rates charged on short-term loans. When that cap takes effect, a payday lender will be able to charge no more than $1.38 on a typical two-week loan of $100, instead of the $20 now charged. Some lenders have said they will continue to operate until the law goes into effect. After that, with their profits legislated away, they will leave the state.

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a short-term loan at market-determined interest rates. Nor can you ride a bicycle without a helmet if you are younger than 16. You can still drive a car without buckling up, and ride a motorcycle without a helmet—for now. A mandatory-seatbelt bill was passed by the New Hampshire house but defeated in the senate. And—thanks to "Bike Week" in the city of Laconia, an annual tourist draw—legislators have yet to dare mandating the use of motorcycle helmets.

Last year, Granite Staters nearly lost the ability to release helium balloons at parties or other celebrations. A bill to ban the release of more than one balloon was defeated only after it was widely ridiculed as an example of the majority's zeal for prohibiting any behavior of which it disapproves.

Democrats would also force the Granite State to reduce its consumption of electricity. Bills making their way through the legislature this session include a ban on the sale of any light bulb that is not energy-efficient, and a mandate that landlords allow tenants to hang their laundry out to dry (no electricity needed). The governor also wants the state to join the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, in order to reduce carbon-dioxide emissions—even though this would significantly raise power rates at a time when high home-heating-oil prices are prompting people to use more electricity.

But those 15-year-olds who cannot ride a bicycle without guidance from the state may now have an abortion without oversight from their parents—and those parents may now be part of a same-sex couple: The Democrats passed a civil-unions law and repealed the state's parental-notification law. And a bill proposed this year would mandate that health insurers cover hormone treatments for transsexuals.

During their last few years in power, New Hampshire Republicans became a flabby self-parody, simply spouting anti-tax slogans instead of governing as effectively as they could have. But by punishing Republicans, New Hampshire voters have punished themselves with higher taxes, a weaker business environment, and more restrictions on personal freedom. If they wanted to send a message to Republican politicians, e-mail would have been a lot cheaper. **NR**

■ THE WORLD

After Normalization

The case of Qaddafi's Libya

JAY NORDLINGER

IN the last days of March, things were perking in Libyan-American relations. And that phrase still seems strange: "Libyan-American relations." An assistant secretary of state, David Welch, met in London with his Libyan counterparts. What were they discussing? They were discussing the compensation that Libya still owes to those affected by Libyan activities. You will remember Lockerbie, for example. (Two hundred and seventy people blown up in a plane over Scotland.)

In Washington, Welch was scheduled to speak at a conference hosted by the Middle East Institute. The event was co-sponsored by the Exxon Mobil Corporation and the Green Book Center. The latter is a Libyan government agency. But Welch was unable to appear, and a deputy appeared in his stead. The keynote speaker was to be none other than the colonel himself: Qaddafi. He was to address the gathering by video hookup. But he, too, failed to appear. Maybe next time.

Such activities are possible because, in recent years, the United States has normalized relations with Libya. And it has done so for good reason—certainly for understandable reason: Qaddafi renounced his weapons-of-mass-destruction programs; he also renounced his practice of terrorism, and his support of others'. Those are "historic" decisions, as the Bush administration points out.

But there is a hot debate in what you might call the hawkish community: Was the rapprochement worth it? Is the deal we struck a good one? Have we turned a blind eye to human-rights abuses? In other words, have we dropped the "freedom agenda" and the "democracy agenda"? And is Qaddafi really out of the terror business? Hawks are split, and that includes the ones serving in the Bush administration.

Qaddafi has played upon the world stage for almost 40 years now. In fact, there are flashing signs in Libya that say "38"—marking the number of years he has been in power. (Yes, and still a colonel, as many people have grinned to point out.) He is both a flake and a brute, a joke and a monster. He likes to be known as the "Guide of the Revolution" or "Brother Leader." And, where Mao had a red book, Qaddafi has a green one—hence the Green Book Center.

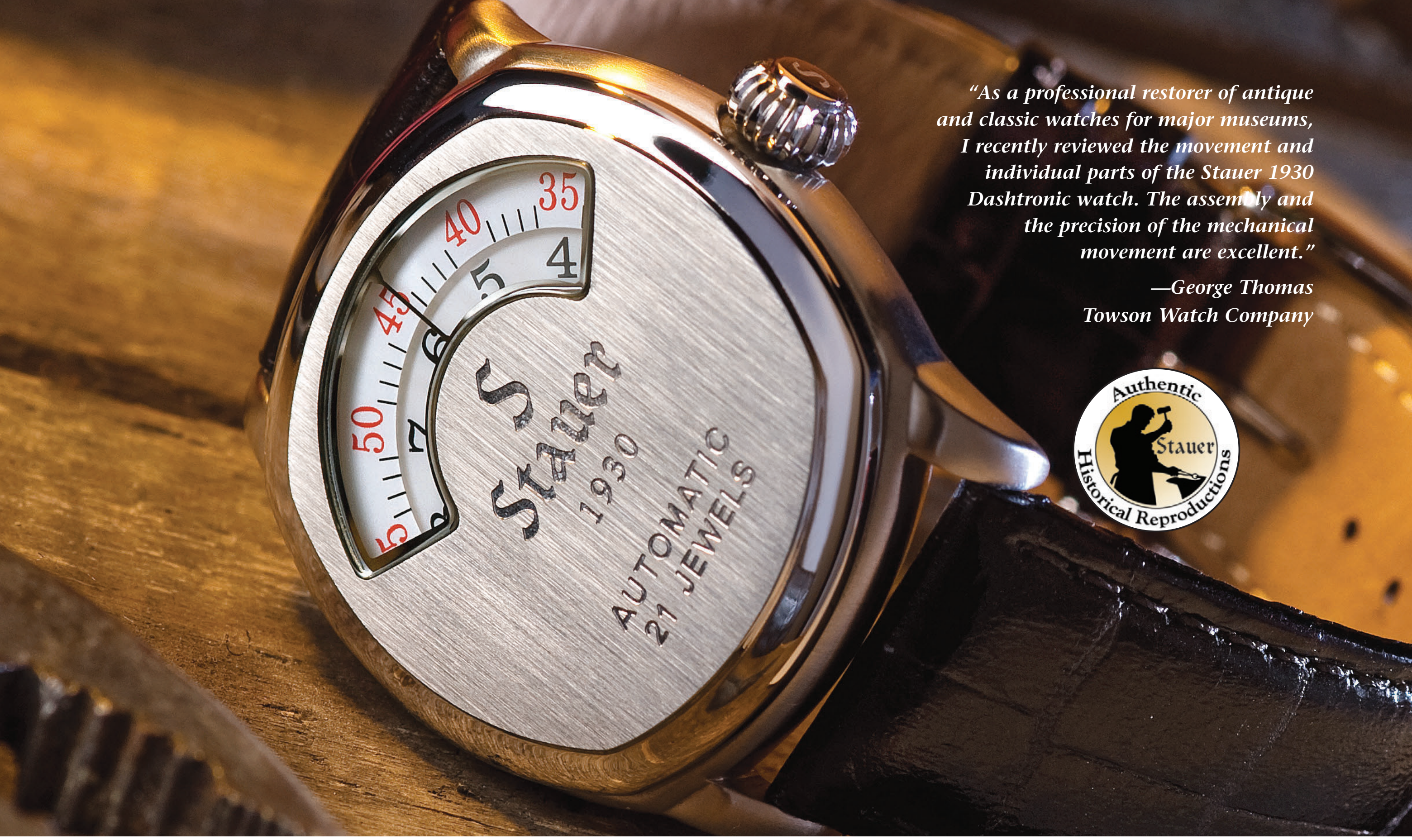
He has inflicted untold pain on the people of Libya, and he has inflicted considerable pain beyond his borders, too. In 1986, he attacked the West Berlin discotheque—La Belle—killing three people, including two American servicemen. Over 200 people were injured. In 1988 came Lockerbie. And the next year came another plane bomb, this one over Niger. (One hundred and seventy-one people were killed.)

All the while, Qaddafi was supporting terror groups—you name it, he supported it. He supported the Abu Nidal bunch, and the Red Army Faction, and the Palestinian cutthroats, and the IRA. In time, some of these people came to make a kind of peace. And Qaddafi said something rather poignant. He said that Libya had "isolated itself for the sake of others." And no one could expect Libyans to be "more Palestinian than the Palestinians" or "more Irish than the Irish."

What did Qaddafi mean by "isolated"? He meant this: The U.N. had levied sanctions against him, and there was no more Soviet Union. He did not have many friends. And he began to think of suing for peace, of "coming in from the cold," as people say.

In March of 2003, he began to have some serious conversations with the Americans and the British about his WMD programs. March of 2003? Yes. As Donald Rumsfeld points out, the timing was not coincidental: The U.S. and its allies were going into Iraq. Qaddafi also passed word to Italy's prime minister, Berlusconi: *Tell the Americans I'll do whatever they want; I want to be spared an Afghan or Iraqi fate.*

Mr. Nordlinger is an NR senior editor. *Here, There & Everywhere: Collected Writings of Jay Nordlinger* can be found at Store.NationalReview.com.



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In October of that year, the U.S. and others made an interesting capture. They seized a ship with the wonderful name of "BBC China." And that ship was loaded with nuclear materials, bound for Qaddafi. The capture of his shipment unnerved him. And he would be further unnerved two months later. Then, the U.S. made another capture, this time of Saddam Hussein, down in his spider hole. According to credible reports, Qaddafi was mesmerized by this event. And his mind was concentrated.

There are people who howl in pain at the idea that America's vanquishing of Saddam influenced Qaddafi. For them, no good at all can come from Bush's Iraq "adventure": for Iraqis or anybody else. And it's true that Qaddafi had had enough of isolation, feeling an economic squeeze. It is also true that he had an Islamist problem: Al-Qaeda and associated groups are against him, viewing him as insufficiently Islamic. He had reason to join arms with his old foes against them.

But a link between Saddam's fate and Qaddafi's about-face is plain—self-evident. A few days after Saddam's capture, Qaddafi did precisely what Saddam had refused to do: He opened up his WMD programs to inspection, and gave them up. He also pronounced himself through with terrorism. Today, Qaddafi's WMD materials are at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, in Tennessee.

Once Qaddafi had come clean, he urged his fellow dictators to do the same. He said that his counterparts in Syria, Iran, and North Korea should heed his example in order "to protect their nations from catastrophe." Those nations had very little use for Qaddafi's admonition. Iran, in particular, scorned him as a weakling and turncoat. And other Muslim radicals were furious with Qaddafi for his "surrender."

Qaddafi gave the United States and the civilized world quite a lot: his WMD; his pledge to quit terror, and cooperate against al-Qaeda. What did he get? Successively, the United States lifted sanctions, struck Libya from the terror list, and restored diplomatic relations. American oil companies are back in Libya, after an extended absence. And Qaddafi is on the Security Council of the U.N. Indeed, he was its president for a month. Also, he went to Paris for the first time since 1973, pitching an elaborate Bedouin tent in a courtyard next to the Elysée Palace. That's living.

So this is the Libyan model, as people say—including President Bush and Secretary Rice. The model is, "Give up your WMD, renounce your terror ties, and we will not seek your removal. There is more than one tool in our foreign-policy kit. We are not set on regime change."

As I've said, there is a great debate among hawks about whether the extent of our rapprochement with Libya is justified. There seems to be no debate at all among Western liberals. They might be represented by Thomas L. Friedman, who has won the Pulitzer Prize three times. In his *New York Times* column, he chastised Bush for not doing enough to offer Iran and North Korea "security guarantees": in other words, guarantees not to abet the democrats who are opposed to those regimes. Whether people are allowed to overthrow the tyrannies above them, with no U.S. support, is unclear.

'Brother Leader'

STR/EPA/CORBIS

Conservative critics of the administration question whether the Libyans moved enough to justify our rapprochement: whether Qaddafi deserves what is, after all, his rehabilitation. They say that the Bush administration was overeager for a success, for proof of its diplomatic ability. They further say that business—particularly British—lusted after the Libyan market. And there is that debate over whether Qaddafi has truly quit terror: The administration says he's clean; others say, "Doubtful." It depends on how you read the intelligence—and perhaps on what you wish to see.

Then there is the question of political prisoners, freedom, democracy—all that jazz. Qaddafi's control is brutal and absolute. The most prominent of the political prisoners is Fathi al-Jahmi, whom Bush once mentioned by name. He held him up as an example of a courageous dissident, whom America would stand by. What about now?

And what kind of message does an embrace of Qaddafi—or an acceptance of him—send to liberals, democrats, and dissidents throughout the Middle East at large? Does it say that we are stinking hypocrites, interested only in oil and dictators untroublesome to us? Does it discredit everything else Bush has ever tried to do? There is also this to consider: We have long said that Middle Easterners must have a better choice than that between the familiar dictators and the Islamic radicals. What about a humane alternative?

Still, many hawks say that much good can come from relations with Libya. With an embassy and staff on the ground, we can have influence on the country. We will be present when the Libyan government transitions from Qaddafi—to his son Saif or someone else. And the WMD factor must not be gainsaid. John Bolton puts it succinctly: "I'd rather have a rotten regime without nuclear weapons than a rotten regime with nuclear weapons." To stop proliferation, he says, is our foremost goal.

There are obviously competing interests here, longstanding tensions, between "realism" and "idealism," "prudence" and "principle," "stability" and "reform." To induce a dictator to cough up WMD is no small thing. But neither is the idea of liberalization—which is also a form of security.

Many of us say, do your deals with dictators, wherever you can. Cage those WMD, wherever possible. Hold your nose, as must be done in life. We are not kindergartners here. But don't forget the men and women in the dungeons. And keep your eye on a reformist future. We put pressure on the Soviets, with whom we had relations. We put pressure on the South Koreans, the Filipinos, and lots of others. How about our new friends the Libyans? (And the Egyptians, and the Saudis . . .) **NR**

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Conservatives should oppose global warming alarmism!

Ever since 1798, when Thomas Malthus predicted that food supply would fail to keep up with population growth, the enemies of individual freedom and free enterprise have used scare tactics to advance their agenda.

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Most scientists and economists believe a moderate warming of the Earth's climate would be beneficial for plant and animal life and for human civilization. They oppose Al Gore's murderous scheme to slow down the world's economic engine in return for a trivial effect on the Earth's climate. According to Pulitzer Prize winner George Will, Al Gore's plans to reduce human greenhouse gas emissions would cause "more preventable death and suffering than was caused in the last century by Hitler, Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot combined."

Conservatives should oppose higher energy taxes or disastrous "cap and trade" schemes. They should stand up and be heard:

Global warming is not a crisis!

For more information on climate change, visit www.globalwarmingheartland.org

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COVER STORY

Mrs. Obama's America

It's an interesting place—but nowhere we should want to be

MARK STEYN

Michelle, *ma belle*: These are words that go together well. She looks fabulous, like a presidential spouse out of some dream movie—glossy hair, triple strand of pearls, vaguely retro suits that subtly remind you she'd be the most glamorous first lady since Jackie Kennedy.

Michelle, "fear," "cynicism": These are words that go together more problematically. Mrs. Obama is most famous for declaring, about her husband's candidacy, that "for the first time in my adult lifetime I'm really proud of my country." Just a throwaway line reflecting no more than the narcissism and self-absorption required to mount a presidential campaign in the 21st century? Possibly—were it not for the fact that almost every time the candidate's wife speaks extemporaneously she seems to offer some bon mot consistent with that bleak assessment.

'YOU MUST WORK,' DECLARES DEAR LEADER

And when she stops looking back across the final grim despairing decades of the 20th century ("Life for regular folks has gotten worse over the course of my lifetime") and contemplates the sunlit uplands of the new utopia, it doesn't, tonally, get any cheerier. Pretend for a moment that the name of the candidate had been excised from the following remarks. Would it seem part of the natural discourse of a constitutional republic of citizen legislators? Or does it sound more appropriate to the leadership cult of Basketkhazia or some other one-man stan?

"[INSERT NAME OF MESSIANIC LEADER HERE] will require you to work. He is going to demand that you shed your cynicism. That you put down your divisions. That you come out of your isolation, that you move out of your comfort zone. That you push yourselves to be better. And that you engage. [LEADER] will never allow you to go back to your lives as usual, uninvolved, uninformed."

The above words were his wife's vision of life under the administration of Barack Obama, the transformative presidential candidate offering change you can believe in—or else. I hate to sound like I'm walled up in the Shed of Cynicism, but the constitutional right to be "uninvolved" and "uninformed" is one of the most precious, at least if the alternative is being "required" to work at coming out of your isolation and engaging with fellow members of the uninvolved, uninformed masses as we push ourselves to move out of our comfort zone.

Fortunately, none of that seems to mean anything in real English, though it has the makings of a totalitarian therapeutic rewrite of "Put on a Happy Face":

> Gray skies are gonna push off
> Move out your comfort zone
> Barack will work your tush off
> Move out your comfort zone
> Give up your gloomy lives so uninvolved
> It's not allowed
> Barack requires every one involved
> So join the crowd . . .

I'm willing to cut presidential spouses a lot of slack. When Senator Obama said Jeremiah Wright was like a goofy uncle, it was pointed out that your relatives are a given but you get to choose your pastor. It's true that you also get to choose your wife, but, unless you're particularly far-sighted, you don't always choose with a presidential run in mind. I found Teresa Heinz's tone-deafness to the rhythms of democratic politics one of the more charmingly genuine features of John Kerry's phony-baloney populist campaign. Who wouldn't love a woman who, shanghaied into lunching at Wendy's, demands to know what "chili" is and has to have it explained to her by the clerk that it's a meat-based food dish widely consumed around the United States?

Oddly enough, despite being a couple of decades younger and several gazillion dollars poorer, Mrs. Obama has a tin ear even Mrs. Kerry must marvel at. Addressing a group of struggling women in economically torpid central Ohio, Michelle Obama eschewed the usual I-feel-your-pain shtick and invited her audience to feel hers, lurching into a long riff on the expense of extracurricular activities for her daughters, piano and dance and summer camp, and somehow she and Barack are expected to figure out how to pay for it on a combined salary of 500 grand a year, not including his book royalties and her corporate directorship. (Nor the house they bought for $1.6 million.) Mrs. Obama's plaint was worryingly reminiscent of the time the Prince of Wales, attempting to bond with some of the British Army's black recruits, said that he too knew what it was to suffer prejudice: At his boarding school some of the boys had been prejudiced against him because he was a prince. ("The people in my dormitory are foul," he wrote to the Queen in 1964. "They throw slippers all night long or hit me with pillows.")

You can understand why a visit to Wendy's by Teresa Heinz, a Portuguese Mozambican ketchup heiress, should come off like an

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ill-advised anthropological expedition, but it's less clear why so much of American life should seem so foreign to Michelle Obama. Come presidential season, the Democrats prefer blind dates while the Republicans make do with the old coot who's been pestering them for a night out since *Gold Diggers of 1935*. So the Dems nominate total unknowns—Carter, Dukakis, Clinton—while the GOP nominates fellows they know only too well—Bush 41, Dole, McCain.

In the case of Barack Obama, it's not just that he's unknown, but that he seems eerily unknowable. When assorted members of the Kennedy clan endorsed him, I was struck by the one respect in which Senator Obama is undoubtedly Kennedyesque: Like JFK, he's cool and a little remote in public; he'll shake hands, he'll kiss babies, he'll essay a self-deprecating remark or two, but that's it. In a white guy, the cool would seem arrogant: Even Jack Kennedy couldn't get away with being Jack Kennedy on the stump in 2008. Yet, next to an oleaginous, ingratiating creep like John Edwards, flaunting his Dickensian childhood, Obama is, like Churchill's Russia, a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma. And, as with Churchill's Russia, it's not always clear whether the interests of Obama and the United States always coincide. In the youthful chapters of his autobiography, *Dreams of My Father*, Barack deploys terms such as "Eurocentrism" and "post-colonialism" with amused detachment, as if to reassure us that even at college these were only ever drolly ironic concepts to him—or, at any rate, merely the universal passwords to sex and drugs. But the same amused detachment pervades the later chapters. On a recent conference call to discuss debate strategy against Hillary, Mrs. Obama interrupted the high-priced consultants to urge, "Barack! *Feel*—don't think." But it's not apparent what, if anything, Barack does feel.

DARREN GYGI

THE SOULS OF CONFLICTED FOLK

That's where Michelle comes in. Whether or not Senator Obama's friends know him, he doesn't seem to know them, not if Tony Rezko or Jeremiah Wright is anything to go by. After another medley of Jeremiah's Greatest Hits was released, the senator declared: "All of the statements that have been the subject of controversy are ones that I vehemently condemn"—or, as translated by *Slate*'s Mickey Kaus, "If it offends you, I condemn it." The Wright brother flies solo as far as his wilder flights of fancy are concerned. Well, okay. But the problem for the enigmatic Obama is that his wife gives every indication of broadly subscribing to the Reverend Wright's world view, albeit without the profanity and accompanying pelvic thrusts.

She was born in 1964, so, unlike, say, Condi Rice, she has no vivid childhood memories of racial segregation. She grew up in a conventional two-parent household that, though poor and living in a small apartment, gathered each evening for dinner, so she's not a victim of the Great Society's atomization of the black family. She was among the first generation to benefit from "affirmative action," which was supposed to ameliorate the lingering grievances of racism but seems, in Mrs. Obama's case, merely to have transformed them into post-modern pseudo-grievance. "All my life I have confronted people who had a certain expectation of me," she told an audience in Madison. "Every step of the way, there was somebody there telling me what I couldn't do. Applied to Princeton. 'You can't go there, your test scores aren't high enough.' I went. I graduated with departmental honors. And then I wanted to go to Harvard. And that was probably a little too tough for me. I didn't even know why they said that."

But hang on. Her test scores weren't "high enough" for Princeton. Yet, rather than telling her, "You can't go there," they took her anyway. And all the thanks they get is that her test scores are now a recurring point of resentment: "The stuff that we're seeing in these polls," she told an interviewer, "has played out my whole life. You know, always been told by somebody that I'm not ready, that I can't do something, my scores weren't high enough." If you were, say, Elizabeth Edwards and your scores weren't high enough, that'd be that (Teresa Heinz could probably leverage the whole Mozambican thing). Yet Mrs. Obama regards state-mandated compensation for previous racism as a new burden to bear.

In an early indication of the post-modern narcissism on display at Zanesville, she arrived as a black woman at Princeton and wrote her undergraduate thesis on the problems of being a black woman at Princeton. *Princeton-Educated Blacks and the Black Community* is a self-meditation by the then Miss Robinson on the question of whether an Ivy League black student drawn remorselessly into the white world is betraying lower-class blacks. As she put it:

> A separationist is more likely to have a realistic impression of the plight of the Black lower class because of the likelihood that a separationist is more closely associated with the Black lower class than are integrationist [*sic*]. By actually working with the Black lower class or within their communities as a result of their ideologies, a separationist [*sic*] may better understand the desparation [*sic*] of their situation and feel more hopeless about a resolution as opposed to an integrationist who is ignorant to their plight.

Ah, the benefits of an elite education. The thesis is dopey, illiterate, and bizarrely punctuated, but so are the maunderings of many American students. What makes Miss Robinson's youthful opus relevant is that the contradictions it agonizes over have dominated her life. Indeed, her apparent bitterness at a society that has given her blessings she could not have enjoyed anywhere else on earth seems explicitly to derive from her inability to live either as an "integrationist who is ignorant to [the] plight" of "the Black lower class" or a "separationist" embracing its hopelessness and "desperation." Instead, she rode her privileged education to wealth and success and then felt bad about it. That's why she talks about money—*her* money—more than any other contender for first lady ever has: It's like an ongoing interior monologue about whether she sold out for too cheap a price. Still, she's learned her lesson. As she told her listeners in Ohio:

"We left corporate America, which is a lot of what we're asking young people to do. Don't go into corporate America."

That's what the Obama campaign is "asking young people to do"? "Don't go into corporate America"? But isn't "corporate America" what pays for, among other things, the Gulf Emir–sized retinue of courtiers the average U.S. senator now travels with?

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And in what sense did the Obamas "leave" corporate America? Mrs. Obama works for the University of Chicago Hospitals. She's not a nurse or doctor. She's a lawyer who was taken on by the hospitals in 2002 to run "programs for community relations, neighborhood outreach, volunteer recruitment, staff diversity, and minority contracting." In 2005, she got a $200,000 pay raise and was appointed Vice President for Community and External Affairs and put in charge of managing "the Hospitals' business diversity program."

You can appreciate why Barack Obama is less gung-ho than Hillary for socialized health care. If you work at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal, there are certainly the usual professional diversity apparatchiks, but they're not pulling down 300K a year plus benefits. You need a "corporate sector" for that.

This is what makes Michelle Obama in Zanesville another Teresa Heinz in Wendy's or Prince of Wales making small-talk with black squaddies. Her "adult lifetime" has been spent in some of the most unrepresentative quarters of American life: Princeton, the ever-metastasizing bureaucracy of diversity enforcement, and Jeremiah Wright's neo-segregationist ghetto of Afrocentric liberation theology and conspiracy theory. If young people were to follow the Obamas' message and abandon "corporate America" for the above precincts, the nation would collapse. Michelle Obama embodies a peculiar mix of privilege and victimology, which is not where most Americans live. On the other hand, it does make her a terrific Oprah guest: Unlike her sonorous, dignified, restrained husband, she has exactly the combination of wealth and vulnerability prized by connoisseurs of daytime talk shows.

There's something pitiful about a political culture that has no use for Mitt Romney, a hugely successful businessman, but venerates a woman who gets more than 300 grand for running a "neighborhood outreach" and "staff diversity" program. They seem curious career choices for the closest confidante of a man who claims to be running as a "post-racial" candidate. Which Barack Obama certainly could have been: He's no tired old race-baiter making a lucrative career out of grievance-mongering, like Jesse Jackson, President-for-Life of the Republic of Himself. In many ways, he's similar to Colin Powell, a bipartisan figure born to a British subject (in Powell's case, from the Caribbean; in Obama's, from colonial Kenya) and thus untinged by the bitterness of the African-American experience. And yet the two most important figures in Obama's adult life exemplify all the tired obsessions he was supposed to transcend. I don't agree with Powell on anything very much, from abortion to Iraq. But, with hindsight, it's a tragedy that he didn't have the fire in his belly to run in 1996. He was truly the post-racial candidate Senator Obama poses as.

Most Americans—even those upscale white liberals who embraced Obama as the new black best friend they'd been waiting for all these years—don't want to think about race that much. I don't suppose the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, in his new, 98 percent white gated community, even thinks about it *that* much. And as Michelle Obama advised: *Feel*—don't think. Is it a bumper sticker yet? It ought to be. It gets to the heart of the matter better than "CHANGE YOU CAN BELIEVE IN," "BELIEF YOU CAN CHANGE," "CHANGE YOU CAN FEEL," "HOPE YOU CAN GROPE," or the rest of the pleasantly gaseous uplift. Everyone feels good about Obama. He's the fellow we've wanted to feel good about for so long.

But Michelle Obama, and her own uncertain feelings for America, put a big question mark over that. **NR**

THE VATICAN

American Benediction

On the Pope's U.S. visit

MICHAEL NOVAK

WHEN Pope Benedict XVI arrives in America this month, he will find an American Church much in need of his tough love and pastoral care. Nonetheless, his native instinct for modesty and gentleness is likely to be the most visible fact of his presence.

Some may ask why Benedict XVI chose to come to the White House this year, at the risk of seeming to engage in politics during an election. My guess is that the Vatican has never had a better friend in the White House than George W. Bush—not only in defending the sanctity of human life, but in exposing the reflexive leftism (and "gnosticism"—to which I will return later) of many international organizations, and in stressing the importance of religious liberty in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Second, the Pope especially appreciates the American founders' intellectual solution to the crisis of religious liberty. That solution has bearing today on the immense difficulties of church and state—which much concern Benedict—that are now being experienced in so many other nations around the world.

Third, Benedict XVI appreciates the substratum of natural law—the universal law implanted in the hearts and minds of all persons—that is expressed in the natural-rights tradition of the United States. This way of thinking has, in his mind, immense international potency. It is rooted in natural reason, not particular faiths, and it pertains to human beings as such, not as they are divided into nations or tribes.

There are further reasons, as well. If the Pope is studying briefing papers in advance of his trip, here are a few of the facets he is likely to go over.

THE STATE OF THE CHURCH

American Catholicism may be one of the two or three most vital national Catholic Churches in the world. Its network of more than 200 Catholic colleges and universities is unrivaled (Germany has only one), even though, over the last four decades, many have become visibly less "Catholic." The level of practice among lay American Catholics is one of the highest anywhere, and their habits of giving among the most generous.

All the same, American Catholicism has sunk far below the vigor it showed just prior to the Second Vatican Council (1962–65). Then, religious orders of sisters, brothers, and priests were bursting at the seams and rushing to build new convents and seminaries of

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Mr. Novak is the George Frederick Jewett scholar in religion, philosophy, and public policy at the American Enterprise Institute. His new book, *No One Sees God*, will be published in August.

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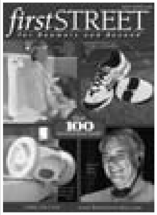

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unprecedented size. Now most of these orders are in severe decline, and many of their seminaries have been forced to close or are only fractionally used for their original purposes.

The number of sisters has shrunk from about 180,000 to 63,000. Thousands of priests have abandoned their ministries. The average age of both priests and nuns is far too high, and the number of new vocations (except in the most orthodox and self-disciplined communities) is below replacement level.

Thus, the record of the Catholic Church in America since the Second Vatican Council is not altogether impressive. A notable laxity has crept in, along with a loss of self-confidence in being Catholic. Even at Catholic universities, it is surprising (in most places) how little graduates know about their faith and its intellectual traditions. Since 1965, secular culture has in many places choked off Catholic culture both in thought and in practice.

For example, the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life recently released a portrait of American Catholics based on its 2007 "Religious Landscape Survey," which points out that roughly one-third of those who were raised Catholic have left the Church. Looked at another way, it adds, approximately one in ten American adults is a former Catholic.

Shy, modest—and bold

DONATELLA GIAGNORI/EIDON/MAX PHOTOS

Of course, something not much different happened upon mass immigration to this country a century ago. Many who came from European Catholic nations, once they landed in America, left the Church for good. On the other hand, some immigrants from nations where most Catholics seldom went to church began, in this country, doing as Protestants did: going to church regularly.

Pew points out that 41 percent of self-identified adult Catholics in the U.S. today attend Mass each week. The tone the Pew survey uses here suggests that such a turnout is poor, but it would be impressive by most western-European standards. In Paris and in London, more Muslims may attend weekly services than do Christians.

Forty-one percent is not poor by the standards of Hollywood, either. Movie critic Michael Medved once took an informal poll and found that nearly everyone he talked to in Hollywood estimated that not more than 3 or 4 percent of Americans go to church on Sundays. The fact is, Medved points out, more Americans are in church every Sunday than have ever formed the audience for a single television event.

Besides, few things are more normal than low attendance among the young. Just 30 percent of young Catholic adults ages 18–29 attend Mass each week. Worshipping God is an act of free will, and it is perfectly normal for young people to act like atheists for a while, or at least like late-sleepers. It is not too surprising, either, that a significant chunk of them return to the sacraments with greater regularity as they marry and have children of their own.

Forty-one percent of Catholics in church on Sunday adds up to about 29 million attendees each week, counting the children. Not many communities do that well. Evangelical Christians do better, mainline Protestants rather worse. The sad part is that Catholics are drifting more in the direction of the latter.

And while Pope John Paul II accomplished much toward his goal of raising the quality of American bishops, we still have nothing like the golden age of great early leaders such as Bishops Spalding, Ireland, and Gibbons. The two things attentive Catholics grouse about most are the low levels of public (and even internal) leadership among a large number of their bishops, and the poor preparation of most priests to give sermons of solid theological quality, stated in simple terms. Many priests (some in practically every parish), no doubt in an effort to be regular Joes, offer far too many details from their personal lives and off-the-cuff allusions to recent movies.

Fortunately, a group of Dominicans and others has begun to publish a handsome pocket-sized monthly, *Magnificat* (www.magnificat.com), with marvelous introductions to the liturgies of each Sunday. It includes brilliant short commentaries on the scriptural texts of the day by early Church fathers, great Catholics such as Dante, and profound modern thinkers such as John Henry Newman and Karl Adam. This handbook ought to improve local preaching much more than it already has. If not, listeners can take refuge during inadequate sermons by reading these more nourishing meditations.

PAPAL PERSONALITY

As for the Pope himself, one of the most beautiful things about him is how faithfully he is just himself—not trying to be like his great friend John Paul II (they used to meet once a week for long conversations, often of some theological and philosophical depth). His training was to become a professor and, more than that, an unusually clear thinker, of extraordinary erudition and fearless intellectual judgment.

As a cardinal, Ratzinger challenged one of the more famous public intellectuals of Europe, Jürgen Habermas, a self-identified atheist, to a debate on faith and unbelief in modern Europe. To the surprise of almost everyone, Habermas praised the role of Jewish and Christian faith in building up the concepts, habits, and viewpoints that gave rise to modern science and to the Enlightenment, while the cardinal praised the role of reason in curbing the toxicity to which careless thinking about religion sometimes gives rise. Public reports suggested that the amity between the two was impressive.

The Pope has always struck those who know him as an unusually shy and modest man, despite his great learning. He prefers to let his clarity of thought speak for itself and presents himself even in casual conversation as a seeker and a constant learner.

Back in the early 1980s, it was reported that four American Catholic and Protestant thinkers sat down with then-Cardinal Ratzinger for an hour of conversation, a kind of *tour d'horizon* of the situation of Christian faith in Europe, the United States, and the then–Soviet Union. The cardinal is said to have insisted that Communism was dead—no one even in the USSR took it seriously any longer (unlike some in Western universities). The great intellectual threat of the future, he said quietly, the one he was most concerned about, was "gnosticism."

Like Eric Voegelin, the European refugee who lived and wrote in the United States for many years, the cardinal was thought to have meant by this a kind of dreamy utopianism, an attempt to escape from human limitations. Gnosticism seeks such unrealistic forms of perfection that it necessarily becomes the enemy of the merely human and the merely good. It leads to dissatisfaction, outrage, bitterness, alienation, depressed capitulation to evil, and, often enough, self-destruction. Perhaps the cardinal was even then working toward his more recent thinking about relativism and nihilism, genetic engineering, and political romanticism as the chief enemies of freedom today.

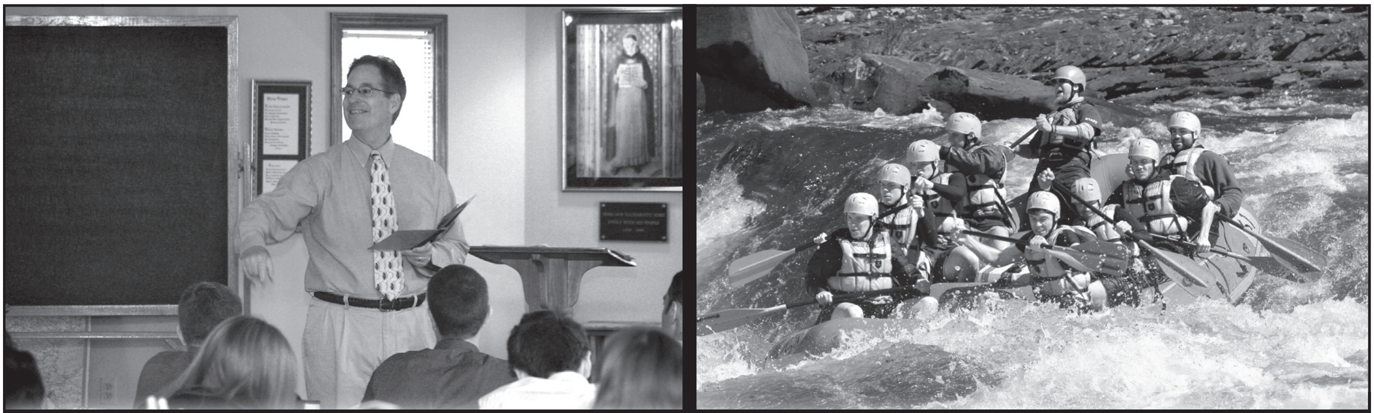
Let me now offer one testimony of my own. About a decade ago in Italy, my wife and I were sitting at dinner in a large family *trattoria*, occupied mostly by locals and a few tourists. In walked a group of about ten priests in ordinary black cassocks, surrounding a white-haired older priest who also wore a plain cassock. Surprised, I rose to greet him; with a smile he offered a formal embrace and welcomed my wife and me to Rome, then rejoined his party. It was Cardinal Ratzinger on his birthday in mid-April, and his staff at the Holy Office—composed of nationals of many lands—was taking him out to a birthday dinner.

At the funeral of John Paul the Great, in a tremendously affecting and passionate moment, before the largest human audience that has ever gathered in a great city of the world, Cardinal Ratzinger preached an eloquent sermon. It was intellectually powerful, poetic, and obviously marked by his friendship with the departed—not to mention his great admiration and affection for the man. One member of our party leaned over afterwards and said: "We have just heard the next Pope." Most of the others didn't believe him. The odds then seemed very long.

While in Rome for two days, however, I collected more than a dozen testimonials from cardinals in newspaper interviews who suggested that Ratzinger might well be their candidate. Even the Jesuits I talked to in Rome were in favor of him, despite considerable Jesuit resistance to John Paul II. So were key cardinals from Latin America (and most of the Germans).

What swayed many was that Joseph Ratzinger has long been known as a modest, holy, and approachable man, more a priest than a cardinal, yet among the other cardinals probably the sharpest pencil in the box. He was also the most learned, clear-minded and future-oriented in his thinking. Most of all, he really "got" what Pope John Paul II was up to.

Further, I knew from my own experience that nearly everything that the "progressive" media said about Cardinal Ratzinger—he was reactionary, authoritarian, unbending (even the president of a great Catholic university in the U.S. once referred to him in private conversation as *der Panzerkardinal*)—was not true, but flowed from their own psychic needs. I had first met the young Joseph



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Ratzinger as a theological consultant (or *peritus*) at the Second Vatican Council, where he was well-known as one of the younger "progressives."

A MAN FOR HIS AGE

The new Pope—well, not so new now—is patient, persistent, and deeply thoughtful, but also bold. His famous Regensburg address—about the dialogue in 1391 A.D. between the Christian emperor of Constantinople, Manuel II Paleologus, and an Islamic philosopher who was his friend—pushed a buzzer to awaken a complacent contemporary Europe. The dialogue in question contrasted reason, as dear to God, with violence, which is contrary to God's nature. That remarkable emperor held off the awful sack of his city by the sultan's hordes during the long years from 1394 until his death in 1425. Yet in 1453, during the reign of his son, Constantinople was in fact overwhelmed, all its churches destroyed or turned into mosques, its Christians killed or forced by the tens of thousands to march off into captivity. Just six decades after that seemingly minor dialogue, in other words, the grandest and most powerful, and at that time most advanced, city in Christendom was no longer a Christian capital. It was a Muslim capital. Virtually the whole eastern Mediterranean was Muslim.

Ideas have a fierce power, especially in pivotal times like ours. Huge and deep issues are at stake, and no one sees that more clearly than this particular Pope. His talk at Regensburg revealed one prong of his strategy: to set up an argument that reason is of God, whereas violence is a sin against God's nature. A second prong is his fresh emphasis on religious liberty. And there he turns to something immediately practical.

Mosques have been going up all over Europe, but now the Pope is seeking reciprocity. He insists on the right of Christians to build churches in Muslim countries, and he requests the cessation of violence against Christian minorities. In Qatar, the Vatican has just opened the nation's first Christian church, and a similar agreement in Saudi Arabia—not uncontested—is in the works. In Saudi Arabia there are almost 900,000 Christian workers, from the Philippines and elsewhere, and in Qatar there are 150,000. They desperately need freedom to practice their religion.

Benedict XVI sees a lot more that can be done to protect Christians in Muslim nations, even as Christian Europe opens itself up to Muslim immigrants. He is kind, modest, and patient, but nobody should underestimate his determination and persistence. He agreed with Pope John Paul II five years ago that a war in Iraq would stir a hornet's nest. But now it is his conviction that religious liberty must be respected there, and the protection of Christians guaranteed, with full reciprocity for the freedom that Muslims enjoy in Christian nations.

Yet the most important point of the Pope's American visit is a pastoral stirring of the Catholic faithful in the United States. One should watch carefully the tenor of his talks to a large body of Catholic educators, to bishops and clergy, and, via television, to millions of laypeople and their fellow Americans. The text for the Pope's address to the United Nations should also be given special attention. Some who should know say that it will be a profound recapitulation of the body of ideas about natural law and universal human rights in which the United Nations (under significant Catholic leadership, by the way) was conceived.

It's the right time for Benedict XVI to come to America. **NR**

■ CULTURE WATCH II

The Truth About Spanking

Promoting a ban is counterproductive

LAWRENCE DILLER

'PROGRESS" in human civilization has been marked by prohibitions against certain instinctual, innate practices, many now considered primitive. These achievements include ending human sacrifice, cannibalism, incest, slavery, and wife-beating. Virtually every society now deems these practices immoral. Abortion is at the forefront of ethical controversy in the United States and, if some have their way, it could be returned to the list of morally proscribed practices.

Other noble social experiments to change human behavior have not gone as well. The 18th Amendment to the Constitution, ratified in 1919, did not end alcohol use, but rather drove it underground. Organized crime was the chief beneficiary. America acknowledged its mistake in 1933 when the 21st Amendment repealed Prohibition. On an international scale, Karl Marx's utopian vision of socialist Communism has never been realized in any country or society without a heavy dose of state terror to counteract the human tendency to avoid work unless it is individually rewarded.

THE NEW ABOLITIONISM

Corporal punishment of children—spanking—is another practice targeted for abolition. Children's rights have been a growing part of the civil-rights movement that started in the 1950s. The work of C. Henry Kempe, a pediatric radiologist who spoke out about previously "hidden" causes of broken bones in children, initiated a series of reforms protecting children against physical abuse. Laws exist nationwide, and a network of Child Protective Services has been set up, to protect children from physical and sexual abuse and neglect.

By the 1970s, a number of states had abolished the use of corporal punishment in school. In the 1980s, anti-spanking advocates began pushing localities and states to make the corporal punishment of children by their parents illegal, as Sweden had done in 1979. Many feminist activists saw protecting children's physical rights as a natural extension of the laws protecting women from spousal abuse. But conservatives and the Religious Right fought back.

John Rosemond, an outspoken syndicated columnist and child psychologist, not only defended spanking but said it was a vital part of raising healthy children. James Dobson, a psychologist and the

Dr. Diller practices behavioral-developmental pediatrics in Walnut Creek, Calif., and is the author of *Running on Ritalin* and *The Last Normal Child*. He wishes to thank Robert Larzalere for his comments on the essay.

founder of Focus on the Family—and arguably one of the most powerful political leaders in the country—made his initial entry onto the national scene in the 1970s with his book *Dare to Discipline* (which has been reissued many times). Dobson did not shy away from physical punishment; he recommended that parents squeeze their child's shoulder to provoke physical pain, when necessary, to get the child to mind. In a more recent book, *The New Strong-Willed Child* (2004), Dobson continued to make the case that corporal punishment is an integral part of raising children.

Meanwhile, Americans continue to spank their children. The latest national survey found that over 90 percent of three- and four-year-olds had been spanked at one time or another. Yet apparently many of these same parents feel that spanking is wrong. Enter the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

The spanking controversy had been heating up for nearly two decades before the AAP finally decided, in 1996, to take a critical look at corporal punishment. It held a two-day scientific-consensus conference at its headquarters in Elk Grove, outside of Chicago. The findings of the meeting were ultimately published in a special supplement of the AAP's journal, *Pediatrics*, under the title "The Short and Long Term Consequences of Corporal Punishment."

The meeting at Elk Grove looked to be the ultimate showdown between anti-spanking and spanking-is-not-always-bad pundits—a sociological Gunfight at the O.K. Corral. Twenty-three experts in the field of child rearing were assembled, and both sides gave it their best shot. Yet the confrontation seemed to end in a draw. Most of the studies cited on corporal punishment came from a clinical population—in other words, they dealt with families that had been referred to mental-health agencies for having physically abused their children. These findings could not be applied to the general population. On the other hand, studies looking at the general population tended to be poorly controlled or retrospective (prospective studies are generally better at avoiding bias).

The best studies of normal families came from Diana Baumrind, a highly respected psychologist from the University of California, Berkeley, who followed healthy middle-class white families prospectively for 15 years. Families where parents occasionally employed spanking (defined as one or two open swats on the bottom of a child between the ages of two and six) as one form of discipline within an otherwise loving context did marginally better over the long term than the very few families that abjured spanking entirely.

The anti-spanking forces offered prospective studies that followed larger, more varied groups of families that employed spanking as more typically used by American families—haphazardly and with anger. In these groups, there were higher rates of mental illness and violence in the children whose parents used spanking more frequently.

So the AAP meeting stalemated on spanking. The group could agree to criticize spanking the way it is practiced by most parents in America: Based on several studies that demonstrated that limited spanking is more effective than none when teaching children the rules of "time out," the working group could endorse spanking only for this set of defiant toddlers, and only in this setting. Yet the conference did have some effect: Its leaders admitted in the *Pediatrics* supplement that "we had a preconceived notion that corporal punishment, including spanking, was innately always 'bad.' During the conference, we became increasingly impressed with the interactive nature of corporal punishment, and [concluded] that the issue of whether spanking is harmful or beneficial to a child must be viewed within the total context of a child's life and environment."

Two years later, the AAP finally issued its guidelines on the discipline of children. Not surprisingly, it advocated disciplining children primarily with positive rewards, and held that if punishment is necessary, the preferred form is the time out. Little mention of spanking, pro or con, was made in the body of the recommendations, but, in an addendum, eleven points were raised, all critical of the practice of spanking and the corporal punishment of children.

The AAP had clearly ignored the more neutral conclusions from the Elk Grove meeting. Letters to *Pediatrics*, some from those who had participated in that meeting, complained that the AAP had used only the negative studies on spanking, in order to justify the proscription in their guidelines.

PEDIATRICIANS AT THE BARRICADES

Also writing in *Pediatrics*, Mark Wolraich, the head of the committee that wrote the discipline recommendations, defended the AAP anti-spanking stance. "It is because most parents spank that such a policy statement is needed. The AAP is not a police body that disallows child-rearing techniques. . . . Spanking was only one area addressed but stands out as one in need of change because of its ineffectiveness, side effects, and the frequency of its misuse." Wolraich made a distinction between the families Baumrind studied and "real life," and wrote: "The conclusions needed to guide practice must come from expert opinion about data different from that required for a research program. Just as for civil rights in America, sometimes society, in this case pediatric society, has to espouse something unpopular before the data is complete (or can ever be) to lead in raising consciousness."

Another pediatrician who was part of the committee that wrote the discipline recommendations later confided in me: "It wasn't easy. We knew about the data [that showed spanking to be positive in some contexts]. But we felt if we included it we'd be open to criticism for promoting spanking, its misuse, and therefore potentially increasing the physical abuse of children. The AAP wasn't ready to take on that chance or criticism."

Essentially, then, the AAP decided to ignore the mixed data on corporal punishment of children in order to pursue a perceived social good, the end of spanking in America. The AAP statement at the time generated some, but not much, publicity. It could be seen, perhaps, as another brick in the wall for society's case against spanking. I have noticed, in my practice of behavioral pediatrics over the years since then, an ever-louder chorus of nays about spanking coming from parents—even as the practice has continued.

In 2007, a California state legislator, Sally Lieber, inadvertently initiated an informal poll on the public's attitudes about spanking. She proposed criminalizing parents' spanking their children who were three years old and younger—and the result was surprising. The unorganized reaction to her proposal was immediate and great: Letters poured in to newspapers statewide protesting both the idea that the government may interfere with private family matters and the notion that spanking is always bad. Lieber's own office admitted that 90 percent of the e-mails she received were against her proposal. After an attempt at watering it down, she withdrew it, vowing to try again at another time.

And in February of this year, in a small but highly influential professional journal addressed to pediatric behaviorists, a psychologist from Canada, Joan Durrant, reignited the smoldering controversy with an article titled “Physical Punishment, Culture and Rights: Current Issues for the Professionals.” In this piece, Durrant, long known for her anti-spanking position, invoked the usual studies of clinical families and of spanking as practiced in the U.S., and also pointed to a United Nations report which stated that “no violence against children is justifiable, and all violence against children is preventable.” The lack of any accompanying comment or critical editorial suggested strongly that the editors of the journal shared Durrant’s point of view.

RED HERRINGS AND RED BEHINDS

Everyone, of course, would prefer that no violence be perpetrated on anyone, least of all children. But what does the evidence teach us about what happens when countries *do* proscribe corporal punishment of children? The proponents of a spanking ban in America often point to the Scandinavian countries, where corporal punishment has been outlawed for decades, as evidence that a ban can be effective. Yet a critical look at the evidence there reveals very mixed results. While parents report less spanking, children who grew up since the Swedish ban show a sixfold increase in criminal assaults compared with the previous generation, along with major increases in juvenile delinquency and substance abuse. There are multiple confounding variables with such statistics, but certainly prohibiting spanking has not led to the hoped-for social improvements in Sweden.

Could it be that America would rather give unruly kids a pill than a swat?

In fact, the controversy over spanking is a red herring—one that distracts from the main causes of children’s poor mental-health outcomes, which is to say poverty, poor schools, and violence and substance abuse in the community. And for the middle class, the fight over spanking has another sad result: It further confuses American parents’ ideas about discipline, which is already the main problem for middle-class kids.

Parents feel mixed-up and uncomfortable about disciplining their children. The growing cultural emphasis on feelings, and particularly on children’s self-esteem, has parents feeling damned if they do and damned if they don’t. (A parent’s setting of limits very frequently makes the child “feel bad.”) While there are a few children who can be raised with nothing but rewards and positive talk, there are many, especially boys, who will push for a conflict in order to have effective rules set. Many children escalate in their search for the boundaries that make them feel secure.

And that’s where the negative atmosphere surrounding spanking further complicates things for parents—many of whom lack confidence in their parenting skills. Confident parents rely less on what the experts say than on common sense in managing their children. But less confident parents are prey to all the contrary and conflicting advice. They generalize that if spanking is bad, then all forms of conflict are bad—so they hesitate to discipline their children, and sometimes even avoid discipline altogether. In 2000, only 53 percent of Swedish children thought parents had the right to reduce their allowance, and even fewer—31 percent—to ground them.

As the confusion over effective discipline grows, one cannot help but notice a wildly growing increase in the use of psychiatric drugs for childhood mental disorders, particularly attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and bipolar disorder. While the reasons for the 1,000 percent increases in the frequency with which these medications have been prescribed for children over the past two decades are complex, ineffective discipline is one of the potential culprits. Indeed, any anthropologist examining current American child-rearing practices would have to conclude that compliance (the act of doing what others tell you to do even if you don’t want to do it) will be learned interactionally with parents and teachers or will be achieved chemically. Could it be that America would rather give unruly kids a pill than a swat?

Here’s the rub on spanking. Just as Prohibition could not end drinking, it may be impossible to stop parents from spanking their children: They will do it regardless of whether society approves. The more society disapproves and tries to make it illegal, the farther such corporal punishment will be driven underground, making it even more inappropriate when used.

Parents struggling with their children’s discipline are usually already waiting too long before taking effective action. This action doesn’t have to be spanking; it could be removal of a toy, denial of a dessert, or imposition of a time out. But often some physical action is necessary for the discipline to be effective. And because parents are too fearful, too conscientious, or too ashamed to take physical actions, they are pushed to the point of “not knowing what else to do.” They then spank in desperation and anger, which is precisely the practice that leads to the negative outcomes associated with corporal punishment.

No one, save the extreme Religious Right, says that parents *must* use corporal punishment in order to raise healthy children. Diana Baumrind, years ago, compared the “choice” to spank with another “choice” ethical quandary, abortion. No one says that abortion should be the primary form of birth control for women. Similarly, Baumrind never promoted spanking as a first choice for discipline. Yet banning spanking is likely to lead to more, not less, abuse of children. Offering parents sensible guidelines for a very limited use of physical interventions, particularly in enforcing a time-out procedure, makes much more sense.

Instead of promoting unattainable and therefore destructive ideals, we should accept the reality of spanking and work with parents and our cultural institutions to ensure that corporal punishment and other disciplinary practices are used in the most progressive and productive manner. Each parent should be allowed to handle the question of spanking differently. Certainly the practice can be destructive and dangerous when used to excess, or too often; without control, or in anger. But for many parents, perhaps even most, a limited amount of carefully administered physical punishment can be a legitimate practice in raising children. Given that, let’s try to help those parents who wish to do it, do it in a reasonable and effective way. **NR**

You deserve a factual look at . . .

Israel and the United States

Is Israel an asset or a burden to our country?

The United States is without question Israel's most important ally. Also, without question, Israel is the staunchest and most reliable friend of the United States. But there are some who believe and vigorously advocate that Israel is a burden to the United States and that, were it not for Israel, peace would prevail in the Middle East.

What are the facts?

The "Israel lobby." A patriotic-named foundation urges, in full-page ads in national newspapers (very expensive – who pays for it?), to influence Congress to withhold support for Israel. Professors from prestigious universities write essays in which they aver that the United States is in thrall to the "Israel lobby." This lobby is said to pull the strings of American policy. Its supposed main promoters are AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee) and the so-called "neo-cons," some of whom are indeed Jewish. They are said to exert an almost magical spell over policy makers, including the leaders of Congress and the President. Some even say that the Iraq war was promoted by this omnipotent "Israel lobby," that the President was flummoxed into declaring war on Saddam Hussein, not in order to defend the United States or to promote its interests, but in order to further the interests of Israel.

> "Israel and the United States stand together in their fight against Islamo-fascist terrorism. These shared values will bind Israel and the United States forever."

Israel is indeed a major recipient of U.S. aid. Israel receives yearly $1.8 billion in military aid and $1.2 billion in economic aid, a substantial portion of our yearly aid budget. Almost all of the military aid is spent in the United States, making Israel one of the major customers of the U.S. defense industry. Virtually all of the economic assistance goes for repayment of debt to the United States, incurred from military purchases dating back many years.

America's staunchest ally. A good case can be made that aid to Israel, certainly the military portion, should be part of the United States defense budget, rather than of the aid budget because Israel is, next only perhaps to Britain, by far the most important ally of the United States. Virtually without exception, Israel's government and its people agree with and support the foreign policy objectives of the United States. In the United Nations, Israel's votes coincide with those of the United States over 90% of the time. The Arabs and other Moslem countries, virtually all of them recipients of American largess, almost reflexively vote against the United States in most instances.

Israel is the major strategic asset of the United States in an area of the world that is the cradle of Islamo-fascism, which is dominated by tyrants and permeated by religious obscurantism and shows almost total disregard for human rights. During the decades-long Cold War, Israel was America's indispensable rampart against the inroads of the Soviet Union. It is now the bulwark against the aggressive intentions of Iran. During Desert Storm, Israel provided invaluable intelligence, an umbrella of air cover for military cargo, and had personnel planted in the Iraqi deserts to pick up downed American pilots.

Gen. George Keagan, former head of U.S. Air Force Intelligence, stated publicly that "Israel is worth five CIAs," with regard to intelligence passed to our country. He also stated that the yearly $1.8 billion that Israel received in military assistance was worth $50 to $60 billion in intelligence, R&D savings, and Soviet weapons systems captured and transferred to the Pentagon. In contrast to our commitments in Korea, Japan, Germany, and other parts, not a single American serviceperson needs to be stationed in Israel. Considering that the cost of one serviceperson per year – including backup and infrastructure – is estimated to be about $200,000, and assuming a minimum contingent of 25,000 troops, the cost savings to the United States on that score alone is on the order of $5 billion a year.

Israel effectively secures NATO's southeastern flank. Its superb harbor, its outstanding military installations, the air and sea lift capabilities, and the trained manpower to maintain sophisticated equipment are readily at hand in Israel. It is the only country that makes itself available to the United States in any contingency. Yes, Israel is not a burden, but a tremendous asset to the United States

Israel is indeed America's unsinkable aircraft carrier in the Middle East and the indispensable defender of America's interests in that area of the world. The people of the United States, individually and through their Congressional representatives, overwhelmingly support Israel in its seemingly unending fight against Arab aggression and Moslem terror. But that support is not based on the great strategic value that Israel represents to the United States. It is and always has been based on shared values of liberty, democracy, and human rights. America and Israel are aligned by their shared love of peace and democracy. Israel and the United States stand together in their fight against Islamo-fascist terrorism. These shared values, these common ideals, will bind Israel and the United States forever.

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Facts and Logic About the Middle East
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Gerardo Joffe, President

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the bent pin

FLORENCE KING

Words from My Grandmother

So Obama had a white grandmother who stereotyped races and ethnic groups. What a coincidence. What a golden opportunity to compare notes and show what people can accomplish when they concentrate on reaching out and coming together to celebrate their similarities instead of their differences. Yo, let's go.

Obama's white grandmother was born in Kansas in 1922. Mine was born in Virginia in 1879 so you know what's coming, but I want to make it clear from the outset that mine always went out of her way to say something nice about whomever she was running down. Never once did I hear her mention African-Americans without adding, "They're so cute when they're little."

Similarly, she unfailingly rounded off her remarks about Jews with a grace note: "They make such good husbands." Actually she had nothing particularly against Jews and usually took back what she said about them in the heat of the moment, because she belonged to the Lillian Hellman School of Discriminatory Arts, whose motto was the explanation given by Hellman, a Louisiana Jew, on why Southerners were the least anti-Semitic of all Americans: "We weren't black and we weren't Catholic, so how bad could we be?" To Granny this qualified as a flawless pearl of deductive reasoning.

It's not easy to be anti-Catholic when you are a High Church Episcopalian but Granny pulled it off by being both for and against the confessional at one and the same time. Gazing proudly at the ornately carved alcove with its heavy velvet curtain, she told me: "You can go if you want to, but you don't have to, and you'd better not let me catch you in there because it's Catholic! Still, it's nice to have it because it looks so High Church."

Florence King can be reached at P.O. Box 7113, Fredericksburg, VA 22404.

Another of her balancing acts was distinguishing nice Catholics from Catholics. She made an exception for what she called, in her plummiest tones of approval, "Maryland Catholics." They were settlers, not immigrants; British, not foreign; and their devotion lay with the Stuart crown more than the papal one. Granny called them "softshell Catholics," which was also what Maryland Catholics called High Church Episcopalians. This was my childhood lesson in what is now called soft bigotry.

Granny was an expert at explaining the difference between differences. One of our neighbors, a woman from Wisconsin, had a nephew who returned from WWII with a Filipina bride and was about to buy a house in Arlington, Va., when he heard about Virginia's miscegenation law prohibiting marriages between different races. Worried, he consulted his aunt, who consulted Granny, who straightened everything out just fine.

"Oh, you don't have to worry about that," she assured him. "It doesn't mean you-all. It's just to keep white people from marrying colored people."

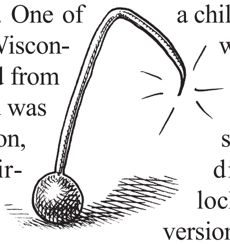
"But she is colored."

"No, she isn't. All they have to do is look at her to see that. It's like the schools. My little granddaughter has Chinese children in her class because the school board assigns them to the white school where they belong."

Her Yankee audience was nonplussed, their bemused faces silently pleading for some evidence of sanity. Obviously something more by way of explanation was needed, so she delivered her standard clincher.

"It stands to reason," she explained.

She had never even heard of Hispanics but I don't doubt she would have found some way to bleach them out to make them fit her census of the mind. With Native Americans, however, she didn't have to do a thing because they served her purpose just as they were. Here's how it worked. A white person from a Western state will matter-of-factly say "I'm part Indian" and nobody pays much attention. But when a white person from Virginia reverently intones "We have Indian blood"—and Granny always phrased it the Virginia way—it is a signal that you have been called to worship in a Shinto temple. It was her oblique way of boasting that her ancestors got here so early that she was bound to have Indian blood because there were not yet enough white women to go around. Her genealogical edifice would collapse under the weight of colored Indians; therefore, Indians are not colored, just red. Quod erat demonstrandum.

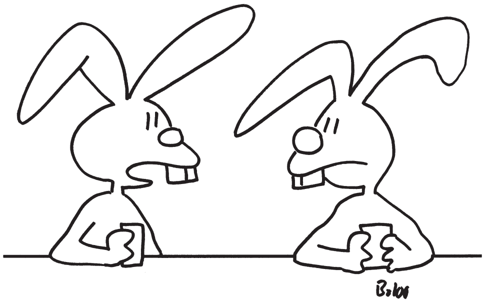


This same underground stream corkscrewed through her ban on the N-word. Whenever the subject came up, she told the story about the severe punishment she received when she used the word as a child. Sometimes it was "the worst whipping I ever had," other times it was "the only whipping I ever had"; sometimes she was sent to bed without her dinner, other times she was locked in her room—and in one version, her mother fainted.

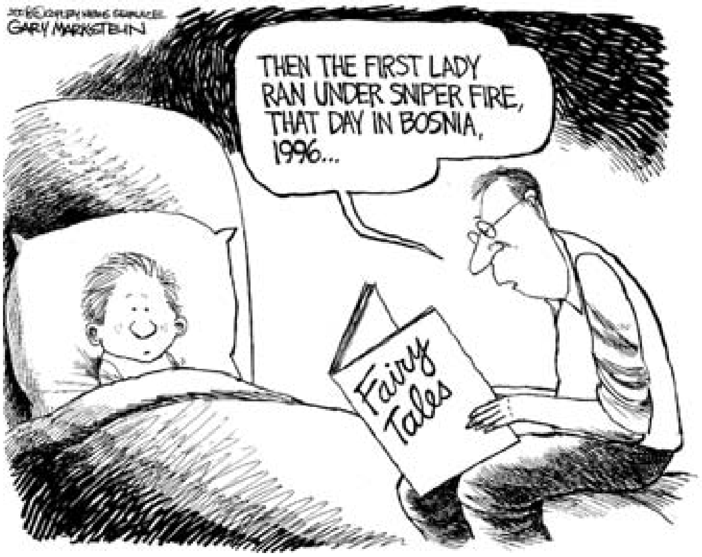
This is the proverbial, ubiquitous N-word story and Southerners have long recited it for the same reason Granny did. Racial sensitivity was only part of her professed objection to the word. The other part was class, pure and simple. Telling an N-word story was a roundabout way of establishing her nice-people bona fides because only poor white trash used the N-word. Today "nice people" are called "affluent college graduates," poor white trash are "high school or less," and the economy is collapsing, so N-word stories have gone national—even Yankee pundits are telling them now.

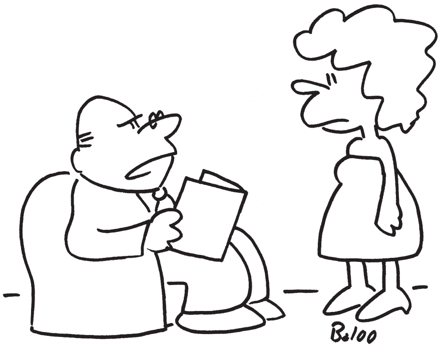
If I had to pick one sentence to stand for Granny's entire racial codex it would be: "She got them all stirred up." The loathing of Hillary Clinton by today's conservatives can't compare to the seething hatred Southerners had for Eleanor Roosevelt because of her support of racial equality and integration. You didn't even have to name her; the "she" was enough. Granny kept up the drumbeat so relentlessly that when we went to see the H. Rider Haggard fantasy adventure movie, *She*, I thought it was going to be a newsreel about the first lady. **NR**

HELP!!!!

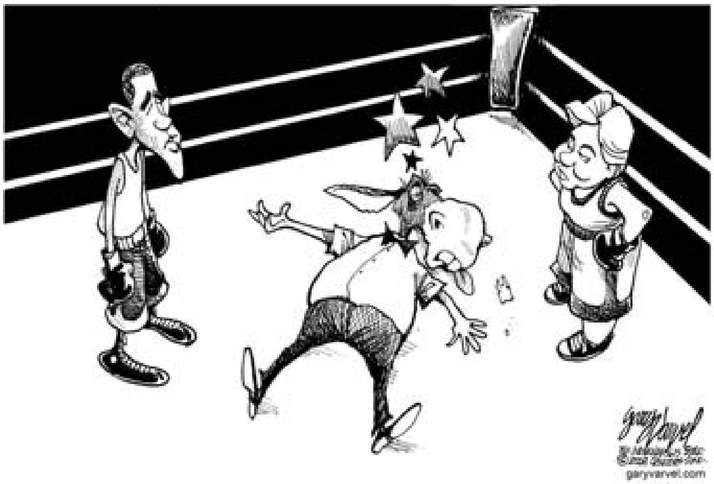


"I'm not particularly religious, but I do believe in Harvey."


GARY MARKSTEIN
THEN THE FIRST LADY RAN UNDER SNIPER FIRE, THAT DAY IN BOSNIA, 1996...
Fairy Tales



"Would I remarry if something happened to you?—Just how stupid do you think I am?"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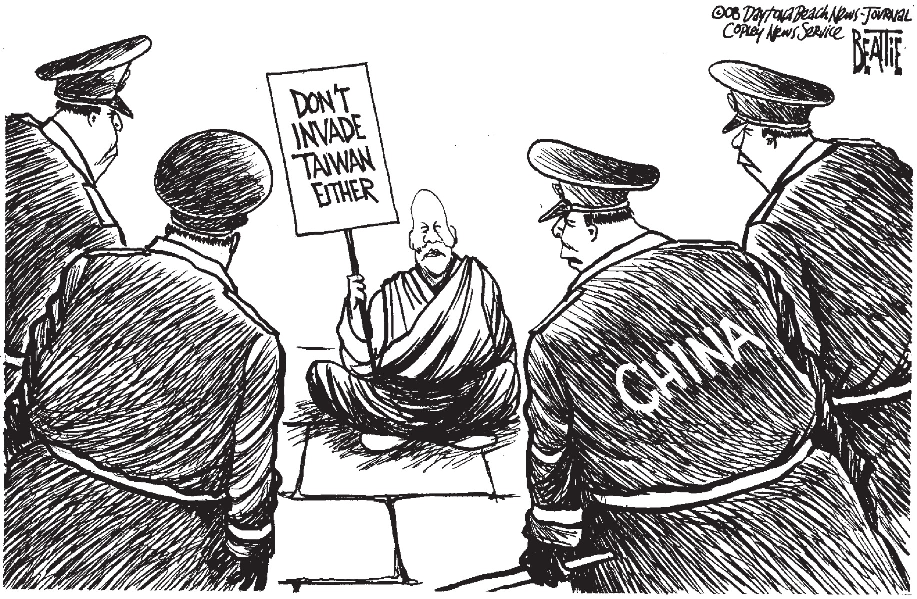
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BEATTIE
DON'T INVADE TAIWAN EITHER
CHINA

"These Tibetan monks are really getting under my skin."

the long view

ROB LONG

Excerpts from the Hillary Clinton Adventure Library™:

"Everybody out!" shouted the junior senator from New York. "Step lively down the stairs," she called in a steady, calm voice. "Head quickly out of the building and immediately start walking uptown. Keep moving! We need to get everyone out of the towers as fast as we can! I've got a hunch this is only the start of a very bad day."

—From *The 9/11 Journal: A Hero's Tale* by Hillary Clinton

"Hi, this is Mrs. Clinton. Is my husband in the Oval Office right now?" I asked the friendly receptionist working the desk that Saturday afternoon. I tried to be on a first-name basis with all of the White House employees—it's important, I've found over the years, to make sure that all members of the team feel noticed, like family—but this voice was unfamiliar to me.

"Mmmmm hmmmm," was the strange reply.

Well, that's curious, I thought to myself. It was a Saturday afternoon, and like most weekend afternoons, there was a skeleton crew working in the White House. I always felt it was important to make sure our staff took some time off, to be with families and children, to recharge those batteries for the week ahead. But still—the staff should always know the whereabouts of the president! And how about finishing your sandwich or whatever before you answer the phone?!

"He is in the office?" I asked again.

"Mmmmm hmmmm," came the odd reply, again. I had half a mind to march down to the Oval Office and see for myself whether Bill was in. Just march on down to his office and barge right in.

But I thought better of it. I stayed upstairs in the family quarters. I had some correspondence to catch up on in any case. And there was always something to read . . .

—From *Close Calls* by Hillary Rodham Clinton

"Shark attack!" the First Lady shouted at the crowd. At first, no one seemed to hear her. "Shark attack!" she yelled again, this time racing to the edge of Squibnocket Beach, pointing frantically to the almost-imperceptible dorsal fin that cut through the shallow waves. It was a hot summer day, and the beach was packed with vacationers and year-round Martha's Vineyard residents. Both she and the president had enjoyed coming to the Vineyard during their time in the White House, and had made many friends there. It was there that she had devised a way to reform the welfare system, and it was there that she had strategized a path to peace in Northern Ireland. Now, though, her beloved island—and the people who cherished her—were in grave danger.

And worse, they didn't know it. Yet.

"Shark!" she yelled. "Shark! Everybody out of the water!" She waved crazily, wildly. *People are going to think I'm nuts*, she thought ruefully. *But who cares? As long as there are lives I can save!*

"Shark!" she shouted, the hot sand stinging her bare feet.

And then, suddenly, people noticed: Hillary Clinton was racing across the sand, shouting at them. Shouting something—but what? What would cause such a trusted, seasoned, tested leader to race across the scorching sand and—

"Shark! Shark! Out of the water! Now!"

They heard her this time. People raced out of the water in great splashing hordes. On the shore, terrified beachgoers pointed to the menacing fin in panic.

"My son!" shouted a beachgoer. "My son is out there!" she wailed.

"Not for long," the First Lady growled as she raced to the water's edge and dove in, pounding at the waves with a series of violent butterfly strokes . . .

—From *Shark Attack!* by Hillary Clinton

I kept looking at the numbers and somehow they didn't add up. Oh, sure, they were all in the right place, in the right columns, and everything the bank said made a certain kind of sense. But something wasn't right, and I had a hunch I knew what it was.

"Are you guys disclosing all of your various off-balance-sheet subprime exposure?" I asked. "Because it looks to me like maybe there are a lot of hidden problems here, and I'd hate for them to get out of hand."

The rest of the board laughed at me. I know, I know: I'm a woman; I'm not supposed to know about complicated issues like derivatives and collateralized debt obligations. But I know trouble when I see it.

"Senator Clinton," the president of Bear Stearns said to me with a laugh, "we appreciate your concern—really, we do—and we're all touched that you'd interrupt your presidential campaign to come here and try to warn us about . . . what was it you were worried about again?"

"Bankruptcy, sir," I said. "The end of this proud old bank. A fire sale of your stock somewhere around two dollars. Or maybe ten. Hard to say at this point."

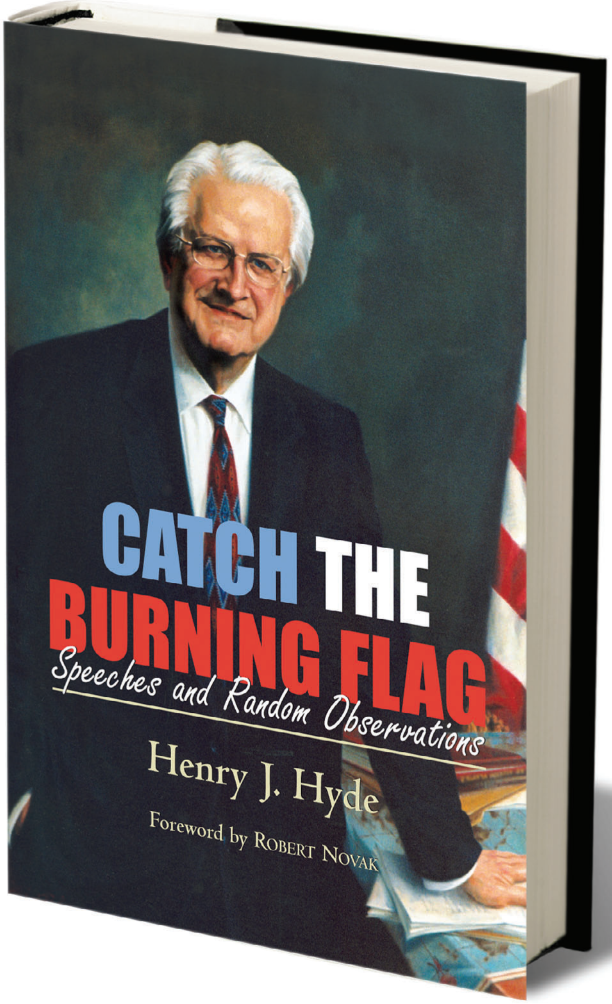
—From *Listen to Me When I'm Trying to Tell You Something* by Hillary Rodham Clinton

Great Speeches by a Great American

NEW FROM *NATIONAL REVIEW*, BY THE LATE CONGRESSMAN HENRY HYDE:

Catch the Burning Flag: Speeches and Random Observations

A giant in stature and influence, the late Henry Hyde's defense of freedom, justice, and the sanctity of innocent human life left a powerful legacy on Capitol Hill and around the world. Saddened by his recent death, we're nevertheless happy to announce *National Review*'s new book by the revered Illinois Republican lawmaker—*Catch the Burning Flag, Speeches and Random Observations.* This handsome hardcover collection captures the most important thoughts and deepest reflections by the great conservative, renowned for decades as the House of Representa-tives' most persuasive orator. A must for your library, and a wonderful gift, *Catch the Burning Flag* (which was in final production just as our good friend passed away) includes Hyde's most powerful speeches (with his own insightful commentary) on a range of key topics, from the Clinton impeachment trials, term limits, and abortion to flag burning, the Iran-Contra affair, and the fate of Democracy. Here's what some leading figures have to say about Henry Hyde and *Catch the Burning Flag*:



George F. Will, Pulitzer Prize-winning syndicated columnist: Henry Hyde's luminous career demonstrated that strong convictions, strongly fought for, need not be impediments to bipartisan respect and affection. Readers of this volume will be delighted by the power of a much-loved man's public life. Their delight will be dampened only by the melancholy realization of how rare such men are.

Carl Anderson, Supreme Knight, Knights of Columbus: For more than three decades, Henry Hyde was one of the most respected Members of Congress. No wonder that this collection of his speeches and essays is wise and inspiring, poignant and funny, candid and insightful—sometimes all at the same time. Hyde recently received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, our nation's highest civilian honor. This book shows how richly he deserved it.

Robert Novak, syndicated columnist (from his Foreword): These speeches reflect a rare combination of eloquence and erudition, and something more. In an age of increasing specialization on Capitol Hill, Henry Hyde was the Renaissance man there. Readers of this book must be impressed by the breadth and variety of his expertise. Considering the liberal assault on Hyde as a Catholic extremist who keeps poor women from abortions and persecuted Bill Clinton, the tone here may come as a surprise to some. These selections are free of Republican partisanship and remarkably non-ideological.

***Catch the Burning Flag* is available only from *National Review*, for only $22.95, which includes shipping and handling.**

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YES! Send me _______ copies of ***Catch the Burning Flag, Speeches and Random Observations*** by the late Congressman Henry J. Hyde. My cost is $22.95, (includes FREE s/h). I enclose total payment of $__________. Send to:

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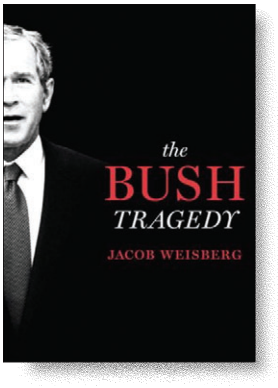
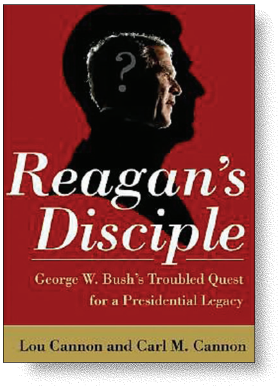
books, arts & manners

Bush on The Couch



The Bush Tragedy, by Jacob Weisberg (Random House, 304 pp., $26)



Reagan's Disciple: George W. Bush's Troubled Quest for a Presidential Legacy, by Lou Cannon and Carl M. Cannon (PublicAffairs, 382 pp., $27.95)

DAVID FRUM

George W. Bush may be among the least introspective men ever to hold the presidency. But no worries! There are plenty of volunteers eager to do his self-examination for him.

Here's Jacob Weisberg: "The president's inability to master his feelings toward his parents drove decisions with terrible consequences not just for him, but also for America and the world. To state it simply, the Bush Tragedy is that the son's ungovernable relationship with the father ended up governing all of us."

And here are the Cannons: "George W. Bush, the son of President George H. W. Bush, modeled—or tried to model—his presidency not after his father's but after Ronald Reagan's."

Bush's own words confirm the Cannons' claim. Here he is in 2005: "I think if I have had to have a mentor, a public figure that reminded me on a regular basis about the power of freedom and liberty, it would have been Ronald Reagan."

And, more notoriously, talking to Peggy Noonan in 2001 about his first European tour: "With all due modesty, I think Ronald Reagan would have been proud of how I conducted myself. I went to Europe a humble leader of a great country, and stood my ground. I wasn't going to yield. I listened, but I made my point."

For Weisberg, the father-son story *caused* the failure of the Bush presidency. The Cannons (themselves father and son) suggest that the father-son story is the best *measure* of the Bush failure. But both books agree that if we want to understand Bush, we have to understand his relationships with the father figures in his life. President Bush himself would dismiss this idea out of hand. But who listens to him anymore? So let's play along and see: What (if anything) can we learn this way?

The Cannons want us to understand that Reagan was a much more cautious and unideological figure than he is remembered as. Reagan moved often in bite-sized increments, and brokered deals with his opponents.

They could have added: Reagan had an uncanny ability to distance himself from the unpleasant compromises of politics. If the compromises proved popular, he could claim credit for his pragmatism. (See Lebanon, withdrawal from.) If the compromises proved unpopular, well, he had been forced to give way against his own inclinations. (The classic example was the 1982 tax increase—actually, the pair of 1982 tax increases.)

Bush, the Cannons argue, has proven himself dangerously more ambitious than Reagan. Bush began his second term by articulating a vision every bit as encompassing as Kennedy's—and with similar implications. "We are led, by events and common sense," Bush said in his second inaugural address, "to one conclusion: The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world."

Yet at the same time, Bush was vulnerably less nimble. They approvingly quote Peter Drucker's assessment of Reagan: "His great strength was not charisma, as is commonly thought . . . but his awareness and acceptance of what he could do and what he could not do." And they add their own verdict: "The missing element in George W. Bush's bold assertions about transformative leadership, refusing to play 'small-ball,' and charging valiantly up hills as his hat flies off his head is this: To be effective, let alone great, the chief executive of the United States must convince the American people that the president's hopes for the future are not just noble, but attainable."

These opinions, it should be said, are hedged with caveats and provisos. *Reagan's Disciple* approaches its thesis by an indirect route. Lou Cannon returns to his roots as a Reagan watcher, recapitulating many of the famous anecdotes from his biographies of the 40th president. Carl Cannon, a famously fair-minded reporter, canvasses and summarizes a wide variety of points of view on the 43rd. The result is a study that will give special pleasure to those who think Reagan great—and George W. Bush . . . not so much so. The Cannons' point of view often disappears from sight for extended periods under the weight of their

These books agree that if we want to understand Bush, we have to understand his relationships with the father figures in his life.

own research. Still, they state their final assessment without euphemism: Bush is to Reagan as Mickey Mouse was to the Sorcerer to whom he was apprenticed. They write:

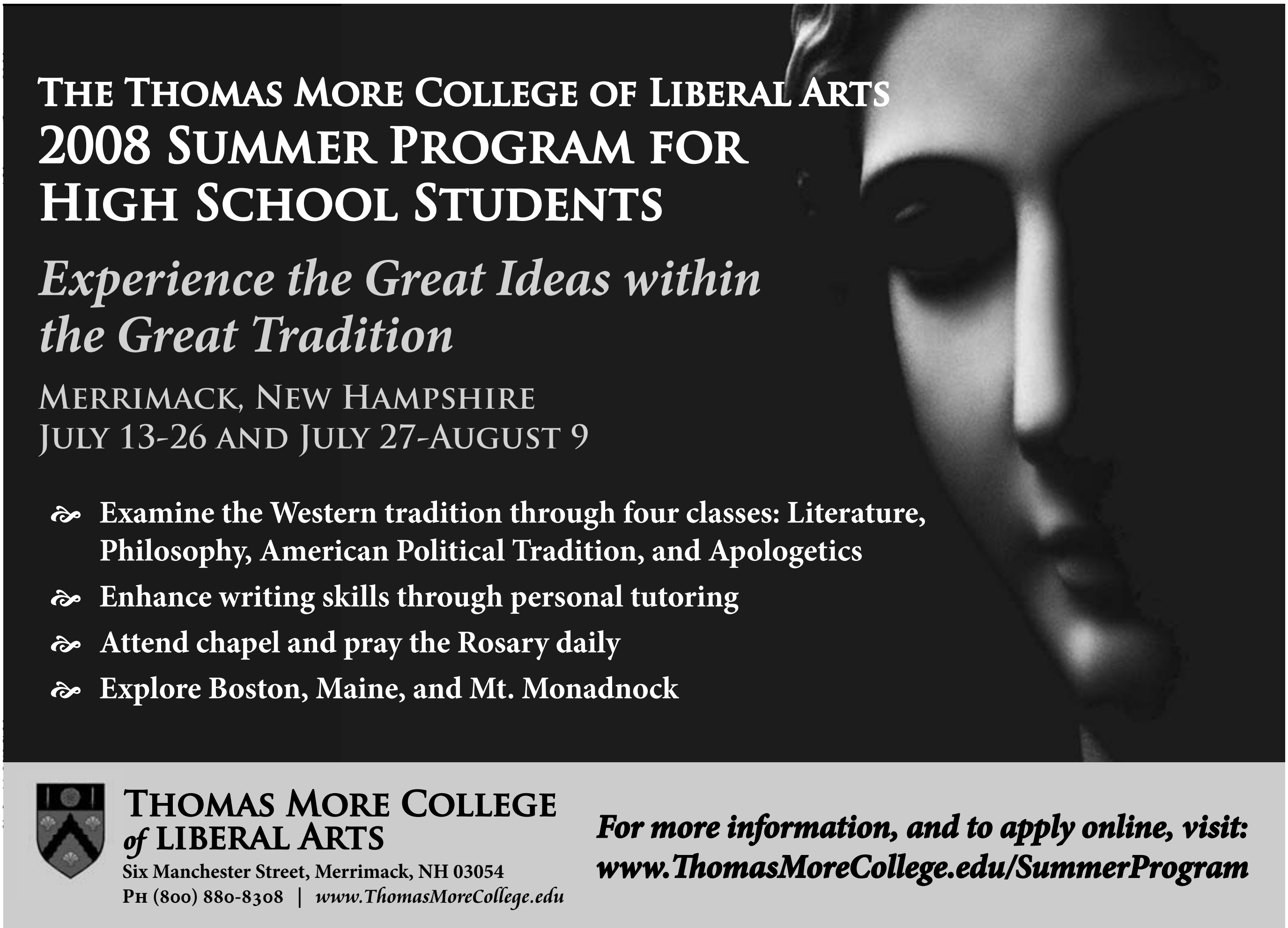
> Bush was Reagan's disciple, to be sure, but he did not face the seminal crises of his administration—especially the Iraq War—with the blend of principle and pragmatism that was the hallmark of Reagan's dealings with the Soviet Union. We do not fault Bush's intentions, but noble intentions do not excuse his performance in Iraq or the domestic failures of his second term. Nor do they explain his refusal to learn from his mistakes.

Jacob Weisberg's essay is as taut and opinionated as the Cannons' is balanced and discursive. Often unfair, it is never uninteresting—and often acutely perceptive. His method is glorified guesswork, a series of hunches, hypotheses, and speculations. Oftentimes these speculations seem grounded in nothing more than Weisberg's own dislike for the president: "Bush's faith was a constructed persona, the projection of a chosen identity rather than a framework for looking at the world. The more inadequate he felt to events, the more deeply he delved into the only religious tradition he had access to, the paltry spirituality of the recovery movement."

Some judgments, though harsh, do fit the facts:

> Despite his MBA training, Bush emphasizes leadership and decision-making to the exclusion of administration and management. He delegates manfully, but doesn't solicit feedback, evaluate results, or hold people accountable, except in extraordinary circumstances. . . . Bush sees reconsidering decisions or openly changing course as evidence of weak leadership. This stubbornness was born of a success that came from not giving in to his parents' doubts about him and not listening to their advice. At a temperamental level, the president has almost no ability to accept blame or learn from mistakes. Disagreement, whether from critics or allies, sounds like his mother's nagging and his father's disappointment. . . . Disapproval hardens Bush's conviction that he must be right and reinforces his refusal to surrender. . . . The problem here is pretty obvious: If all criticism is discounted as whining and accepting it equates to personal weakness, how can you ever recognize that you're wrong?

Other Weisberg insights correspond to first-hand observation: "All this talk of God and guidance, this biblical imagery, must, we imagine, mean *something*, perhaps tempered to accommodate the strictures of secular leadership. But . . . it doesn't—it's mostly resonant speechwriting. . . . To look for a theological motivation [in Bush's foreign policy] is to fall into the fallacy of thinking that Bush's oratory is packed with more meaning than it seems to be, when it usually contains less."



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Mon./Nov. 10	Providenciales, Grand Turk	7:00 AM	3:00PM	afternoon seminar late-night smoker
Tue./Nov. 11	San Juan, Puerto Rico	10:00AM	11:00PM	
Wed./Nov. 12	St. Thomas, USVI	8:00AM	5:00PM	evening cocktail reception
Thu./Nov. 13	AT SEA			morning/afternoon seminars late-night smoker
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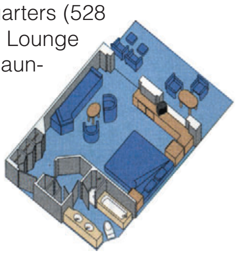

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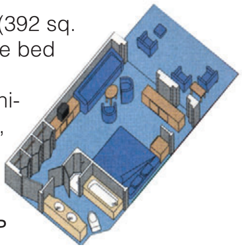

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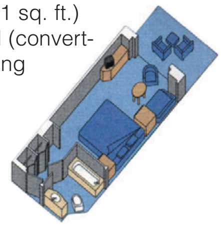

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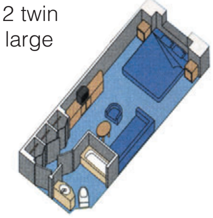

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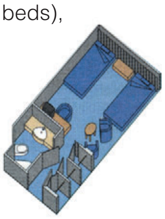

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Hostile as it is, *The Bush Tragedy* reads with the gripping fascination of a lurid magazine profile. At the same time, its judgments have to be handled with extreme care. Weisberg reports stories of Bush's occasional high-handed treatment of subordinates—not the only president afflicted with that failing, surely. He omits the much larger body of stories one could tell of the president's compassion, sensitivity, and generosity.

He closely analyzes the Bush-Walker clan's divided attitude to money, half noblesse oblige, half conspicuous display—in ways that do not do justice to George W. Bush's notorious indifference to material things. (Has any president ever worn a cheaper watch?)

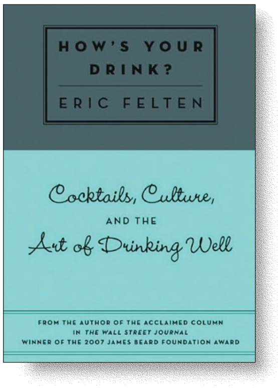
Most important, Weisberg has not given due importance to the frankest self-explanation Bush himself has ever chosen to put on the record, in an interview recorded by Robert Draper in his book *Dead Certain*:

> And part of being a leader is: People watch you. I walk in that hall, I say to those commanders—well, guess what would happen if I walk in and say, "Well, maybe it's not worth it." When I'm out in the public, I fully understand that the enemy watches me, the Iraqis are watching me, the troops watch me, and the people watch me.
>
> The other thing is that *you can't fake it*. You have to believe it. And I believe it. I believe we'll succeed.

Weisberg dismisses this statement as contrived auto-hypnotism. But isn't it true? And isn't it something that almost every president ever to wage a war would have agreed with? And isn't it maybe essential to the reason that the war in Iraq, a war Weisberg also once supported, looks so much better today than it did a year ago?

Weisberg acknowledges toward the end of his book that history's verdict on Bush may be less emphatic than his own. He protests, however, that "Bush cannot hide his mistakes behind the unknowability of future judgment." That's true so far as it goes. But someday that future judgment will be known. And when such knowledge arrives, one has to wonder whether the personal flaws and family foibles to which Weisberg devotes so much analytic energy will continue to seem central to the grand narrative of our times. **NR**

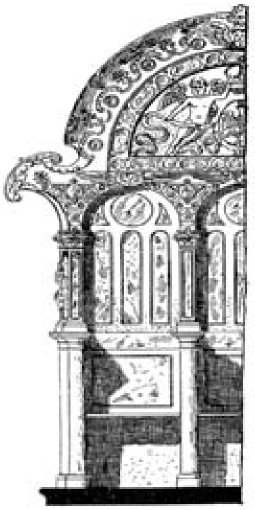
Serious Drinking


HOW'S YOUR DRINK?
ERIC FELTEN
Cocktails, Culture, AND THE Art of Drinking Well
FROM THE AUTHOR OF THE ACCLAIMED COLUMN IN THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
WINNER OF THE 2007 JAMES BEARD FOUNDATION AWARD

How's Your Drink? Cocktails, Culture, and the Art of Drinking Well, by Eric Felten (Agate, 200 pp., $20)

JOHN O'SULLIVAN

ERIC FELTEN might be called a retro Renaissance man. When not hosting a current-affairs program on the Voice of America, he writes a column on cocktails for the weekend *Wall Street Journal*, plays the trombone, sings, and conducts a full swing orchestra. One recent Christmas I heard him conduct Duke Ellington's version of Tchaikovsky's "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy," which, in translation to jazz, becomes "Sugar, Rum, Cherry." It sounds like a chapter heading in this wonderful little book.



As well as being wonderful, however, this is a book that is hard to categorize. *How's Your Drink?* is not one of those handy technical manuals, kept next to the cocktail cabinet to be surreptitiously consulted by the host at parties. It's much more fun than that. But the reader *will* learn much useful technical information on how to make a good cocktail in general and more than 50 good cocktails in particular.

Nor is it a comprehensive history of the cocktail—though it meanders close to that. Like the good raconteur that he is, Felten is too easily diverted by a funny story or a good quote to stick too closely to a single narrative. Besides, no one knows when and where the first cocktail was invented. The author and the OED between them tell us that its first mention in print occurred in the *Farmer's Cabinet* in 1803—rather earlier than I would have guessed. And Felten traces the (often competing) histories of how particular cocktails were invented, added to, refined, perfected, and sometimes spoiled by innovators in the two centuries since then.

These investigations turn out to require more scholarly work than you might imagine, because drinkers are not always reliable witnesses and barmen sometimes claim the paternity of drinks first mixed by others.

Yes, I was shocked too.

It's not quite a social history of the cocktail either. Such a work would have to be both more voluminous and more systematic. But the reader will again pick up much fascinating information on how temperance, prohibition, war, technical innovation, the changing role of women, etc., etc., altered drinking habits. (Consider cosmopolitans, other sugary "girly drinks," and the recent decline and fall of the martini, which prompted Judge Robert Bork to write *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*.)

It's not even a narrow political history of the martini. That would be pretty voluminous, too: The cocktail has been an (almost) innocent bystander in several political scandals, two of them involving Roosevelts. Accused by an opposition newspaper of being habitually drunk, Teddy Roosevelt took out a libel suit and swore on oath that his entire cocktail intake in the years since he had left the White House had been two mint juleps. But then, as we conservatives have consistently maintained, a gentleman should never be asked on oath about his private drinking habits.

FDR's crime was more serious. He used to engage in spirited conversation while mixing his famous martinis and so quite often got the proportions wrong. He really preferred old fashioneds, about which he was a stickler for convention, reacting strongly when his secretary Grace Tully suggested he try the drink with scotch rather than bourbon: "I never heard of such a thing. It's absolutely sacrilegious."

In short, Felten's book is a kind of cocktail in itself, a mixture of history, anecdote, chemistry, and wit that meanders from one thing to another in a relaxed and civilized manner, in the once-celebrated style of essayists such as Robert Lynd and G. K. Chesterton. It might almost have been called *On Chasing after One's Cocktail*.

In his review of the book, Christopher Hitchens stressed the American paternity of the cocktail, pointing out that in Europe it was most likely to be mixed with any accuracy in places named "The American Bar." My own education bears this out. It was earned in the 1970s in the Ritz's American Bar, where the aged barman, in addition to dispensing sidecars, etc., would also keep me entertained with stories of what Noel and Gertie, the Prince of Wales and Mrs. Simpson, Ivor Novello, Winston Churchill, Chips Channon, Em-

---

GENERAL GRANT

Despite his capture
of three complete Confederate armies:
at Donelson, at Vicksburg, and Appomattox:
achievement without parallel
in the war;
his star hovers,
clear and bright though it is,
somewhere near the horizon.

Even the force and precision
of his own words,
and often of his recollections,
written up to,
and all but including
his dying day,
provide no myth to his memory;
though it cannot be denied
their publication provided
a comfortable life
too long deferred
for his honorable wife.

So he could fight and write.
Yet each satisfaction and success
could be disturbing and temporary.
The accolades of the Europeans gently set aside,
we can make a joke about
what remains lie in his tomb,
and speculate on the success
of this not so simple man from Illinois.

The forms elusive of his American dream:
hard work that leads nowhere;
fraud and financial disasters
of New York's most clever elite . . .
ripples across the pond . . .
as hard to take as Chicago's bitter winds
for a man on a street corner
selling frozen firewood.

It is not hard to admire him.
There is always something in Grant
that speaks of simple dignity
along the lines of Rembrandt's self-portraits,
without the overtones of glory
that the champions of Southern history
seek so avidly for their heroes:
The shattered petals,
the blood across the peach blossoms—Shiloh,
where modern war
broke upon the world.
They are part of the reason.
So is the grinding, war-weary attrition,
dragged from the Wilderness
to the siege of Petersburg,
taking all summer and winter,
into the spring.

To find no glory in any of it is to
overspeak the truth,
as is the invocation of duty,
self-sacrifice and commitment,
as an explanation, complete.

On any canvas worthy of the paint
there is no such thing;
although at the distance
of almost a century and a half,
I would be remiss
in not siding with those
who call him
America's greatest soldier.

Much of the rest is elusive,
and as far from his impressive resting place
as is the ribbon of a distant river
disappearing into a distant forest.

—WILLIAM W. RUNYEON

erald Cunard, and other interwar celebrities had drunk.

Perhaps as a result, it's my impression that the cocktail crossed the Atlantic in a big way in the 1920s. It is associated there not only with America but also, not coincidentally, with a slightly dated modernity itself, with streamlining, Art Deco, dance marathons, the Jazz Age, *Vile Bodies*, F. Scott Fitzgerald, the *Thin Man* movies, and not only songs by Noel Coward and Cole Porter but Coward and Porter themselves. Both put cocktails into songs, Porter into several. The latter's "Two Little Babes in the Wood" catches this mood:

> Now, the two little babes in the wood
> Are the talk of the whole neighborhood,
> For they've too many cars, and too many
> clothes,
> Too many parties, and too many beaux.
> They have found that the fountain of
> youth
> Is a mixture of gin and vermouth.
> And the whole town's agreed
> That the last thing in speed
> Is the two little babes in the wood.

All the fun-loving spirit of the Twenties poured into a single glass. Coward's "Poor Little Rich Girl" adds a prescient dash of bitters:

> Cocktails and laughter
> But what comes after?
> Nobody knows.

For drinkers approach a good cocktail with at least slight trepidation. As the saying goes, it's a serious drink with a hint of danger it would be foolish to ignore. Felten tells the warning story of Lt. Bill Wilson, who, at a post–Great War party, tried a Bronx cocktail for the first time, liked it, and soon found that one or two of them transformed him into a witty and wise partygoer. After some further adventures he went on to found Alcoholics Anonymous.

No one feels quite that sense of risk, perhaps mistakenly, when ordering a glass of wine or even champagne. Simply ordering gives the cocktail drinker something like bragging rights. Stephen Potter, the inventor of gamesmanship, exploits this distinction in one ploy:

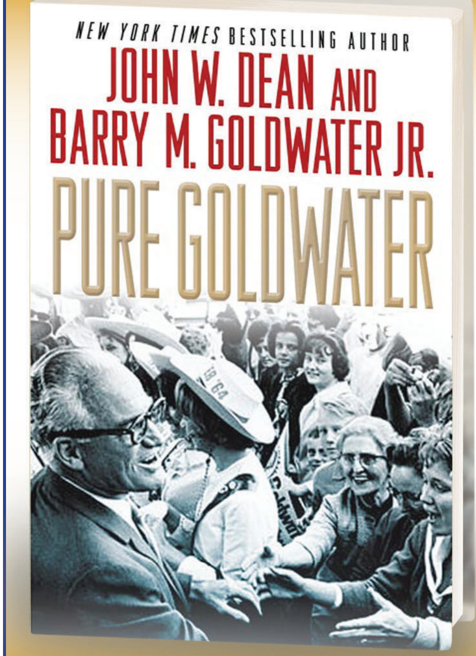
> I shall always remember Odoreida thrusting aside sixteen founder members of the Wine and Food Society with a "Well, let's have a real drink," and throwing together a mixture which left them breathless.
>
> "Pop-skull, they called it in Nevada," he said, and poured two parts of vodka into one of sherry and three of rum, adding a slice cut from the disc of a sunflower.

But none of these attractions explains the mysterious allure of the cocktail to regular or hardened drinkers. Why do they prefer it—not everyone does—to straight spirits, champagne, wine, or beer? Doubtless many people would answer that question many different ways and some of them would be guessing at a reason they don't quite understand themselves. My own explanation, however, is that drinking a cocktail is an attempt to recover the experience of that occasion when we had our first genuinely enjoyable alcoholic drink. In my case it was a glass of Drambuie given to me by a friend on a school trip in 1957. I have never quite forgotten the moment. In the novel *Kipps*, H. G. Wells captures the very similar result when his modest hero has his first glass of whisky: "Kipps . . . drank another sip of old Methuselah. . . . He was able to follow the subsequent course of that sip for quite a long way. It was as though the old gentleman was brandishing a burning torch through his vitals, lighting him here and lighting him there, until at last his whole being was in a glow."

Alas, no second, third, fourth, or subsequent glass ever has quite the same effect. We may settle down monogamously with a favorite. (Drambuie never won me over to that extent.) We may gradually drink our way through the multicolored array of bottles under the bar mirror opposite. We may be quietly and sensibly satisfied with whatever becomes our regular tipple. But ecstasy rarely strikes a second time with the same drink—and never a third.

"The only aphrodisiac is variety," said Norman Douglas. That may be true in love, but when it comes to drinking, there is a near-substitute for variety. In its numerous variations the cocktail tantalizes us with the promise of a second first fine careless rapture.

And sometimes it delivers. **NR**



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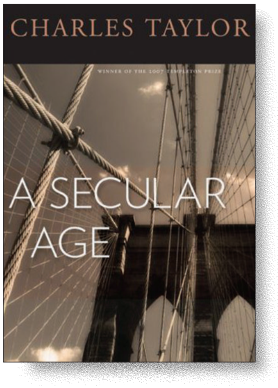

A Secular Age,
by Charles Taylor
(Harvard, 874 pp., $39.95)

JOHN WILSON

Charles Taylor’s magnum opus, *A Secular Age*—an expanded version of his 1999 Gifford Lectures—adds another volume to the vast literature that has appeared in the last 40 years, since cracks began to appear in the edifice of “secularization theory.” Was it possible after all that “modernity”—whatever it was or is, whenever precisely it started—*didn’t* inexorably undermine religion?

A Secular Age is a garrulous book that gives the impression, at times, of having been transcribed from a setting in which a very intelligent man was engaged in thinking out loud, in the company of initiates. (Have you ever dipped into those volumes based on Jacques Lacan’s legendary seminars, said to have attracted the finest minds in Paris?) The effect is sometimes appealing, but it becomes wearying. This new book could be read as a sequel of sorts to Taylor’s best-known work, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*. A distinguished philosopher and a faithful Catholic (though not “a Catholic philosopher”), winner of the Templeton Prize, Taylor has long been interested in the difference modernity makes. Here he seeks to reframe the secularization debate by starting with a single question, which he phrases in several ways. “The change I want to define and trace,” he writes, “is one which takes us from a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others.” Put another way, the question sounds like this: “Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?”

What interests Taylor, in other words, is the new “conditions of belief” that come with secularity, not simply what people believe or don’t believe but “*what it is to believe*.” To be a religious believer in the modern context is a very different thing, he insists, than it was in the past: “It puts an end to naïve acknowledgment of the transcendent. . . . Naïveté is now unavailable to anyone, believer or unbeliever alike.” And, a few pages later, in case you missed it the first time: “There are no more naïve theists, just as there are no naïve atheists.” (One reason the book is so long—nearly 900 pages, but it seems much longer—is that Taylor says everything at least three times.)

It is this particular understanding of secularity—which he is careful to spell out at the beginning, distinguishing it from other alternatives—that allows Taylor to maintain that “we” (“I mean the ‘we’ who live in the West, or perhaps Northwest, or otherwise put, the North Atlantic world”) live “in a secular age.” If you point out that even in the part of the world he has isolated to advance his thesis, there is the pervasively religious United States to be considered, Taylor will reply that the “conditions for belief” he has described obtain in the United States as well.

This set-up raises a host of questions. How is it, we might wonder, that Taylor is so sure of a time when it was “virtually impossible not to believe in God”? Does this inference follow from the public face of Christendom? And why, on the other hand, does he exaggerate the prevalence of unbelief in “our modern civilization”? If we grant that sometime in the past—in the Dark Ages, say, after Augustine but before we came along—there were “naïve theists,” can we confidently say that they are now rare? How do we know?

And is it really the case, as Taylor asserts, invoking Max Weber, that “disenchantment” is a defining aspect of “our modern condition”? Would it not be truer to say that, while many modern people and institutions do indeed conform to Weber’s account, many others see the world as a realm of numinous forces—whether in Christian terms, or through some form of neopaganism, or via yet another idiom?

Then there is the effect of limiting the story to “the North Atlantic world.” It seems quite bizarre to write such an ambitious book on this particular subject at this particular time and say so little about Islam, but that is only one example of the distorting effect of Taylor’s approach. (Why, for instance, is his treatment of conversion so narrow? How would it have looked had he considered conversions to Christianity in China today?) He’s well aware that much has been left out, of course, and acknowledges it. Indeed, both a strength and a weakness of the book is his readiness to acknowledge that he’s offering one “story” about modernity and secularization, that there are many other stories to be told, some with a different scope, some with competing premises, and so on. I’m quite sure he considered all the questions that came to my mind as I was reading, and more besides. He might say he didn’t feel competent to consider how Islam inflects our understanding of modernity and secularity, that to bring in other trajectories outside the North Atlantic world (in China or Africa or Latin America) would extend what is already a very long book to a truly unmanageable length, even supposing he did feel ready to tackle some of those matters. He wrote the book he set out to write, not someone else’s.

Fair enough. So why did Taylor tell the story this way? Granted the impossibility of adequately summarizing the book (which includes, among other excursuses, an extended and rather unsatisfactory meditation on sacred violence and the nature of war), what seems to be the gist?

In a key chapter titled “Religion Today,” about 500 pages into the book, Taylor observes that while in Western Europe the “fading contact of many with the tradi-

Mr. Wilson is the editor of *Books & Culture*, a bimonthly review.

tional languages of faith seems to presage a declining future," nevertheless "the very intensity of the search for adequate forms of spiritual life that this loss occasions may be full of promise." He goes on to suggest that the situation in Western Europe may be analogous to that in post-Communist Russia as sketched by Mikhail Epstein, who describes a kind of "mere Christianity" among people who don't identify with the Orthodox Church or with any particular denomination. They practice what Epstein calls "minimal religion"—in Taylor's account, "a spirituality lived in one's immediate circle, with family and friends, rather than in churches, one especially aware of the particular, both in individual human beings, and in the places and things which surround us."

He then quotes a passage from Epstein that seems to me to get at the very heart of what Taylor himself is driving at in *A Secular Age*: "Sooner or later a minimal believer usually joins a specific religious tradition, becoming an Orthodox Christian, a Baptist, or a Jew. But after having experienced this resonant space of the void, the wilderness, [the believer] preserves the new feeling of openness forever. It is there, in a wasteland of spirit, without any preparations, baptisms, catechisms, that God suddenly grabs hold of him." In Epstein's telling, the "atheistic past, . . . the wilderness" from which the believer is rescued is rather like a purgatorial fire. The believer comes out of it with "a striving for a fullness of spirit, transcending the boundaries of historical denominations. These people who have found God in the wilderness feel that the walls of the existing temples are too narrow for them and should be expanded." And Taylor concludes the chapter on this note: "We are just at the beginning of a new age of religious searching, whose outcome no one can foresee."

Taylor, I think, wants us to see the whole story of modernity and secularization in the light of this "wilderness," from which—almost as if by providential design—faith emerges as more authentic. It is a vision containing much that is attractive and some bits that are not, especially the warmed-over rhetoric heralding a "new age of religious searching." What strikes me is not how "new" these hopes and yearnings are but rather how deeply they resonate with recurring themes going back many centuries. **NR**

■ **TELEVISION** ■

Tension City

PETER SUDERMAN

THE saying goes that "all politics is local," but on HBO's *The Wire*, everything local is politics. Set in a decaying Baltimore riddled with crime and corruption, the series is ostensibly an investigation into the city's drug trade and the various (usually ineffectual) police efforts to stop it. But as the seasons have progressed, the show has expanded beyond its narrow cops-and-dealers focus, bringing in unionized dock workers, city government, the public school system, and, in this year's finale season, the news media. Instead of centering on the minutiae of detective work, the cop-show format provides a framework that's used to explore the ways in which a city functions. Each season is positioned as a close-up on a few of the gears and levers that make up the great machine of civilization.

With its closely drawn characters, there's a great intimacy to the proceedings, but the series is nothing if not epic in both its breadth and its ambition. It's a show about power struggles big and small, about institutional dysfunction and human pettiness, which it suggests are almost always the same thing. As TV drama goes, it's unrivaled; as social commentary, it's a frightening and empathetic vision of urban decline, the city slowly crumbling, one street corner, classroom, and public office at a time.

It would be far too easy for the series to have been a boring dud of a civics lecture. That it is unequivocally great drama only serves to make it more devastating. Widely hailed as a masterpiece, the show has attracted increasing attention in recent years, with glowing praise from—among others—*Slate*, *The Atlantic*, *New York*,

Mr. Suderman is associate editor of *Doublethink*.

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and *The New Yorker*. It’s not hard to see why: superbly sly dialogue expertly finished with regional affect, a vast and compelling cast of characters, a cleverly nuanced moral universe, portraits of social subgroups so layered they could practically serve as sociology texts. Despite some missteps in the final season, likely due to HBO’s decision to finance only ten episodes rather than the usual 13, it’s safe to say that if anything as lowly as a television show ever deserved the label Shakespearean, *The Wire* is it.

The Wire*’s Jimmy McNulty (Dominic West)*

HBO

As the praise has intensified, and media interest—if not viewership—has ratcheted up, series mastermind David Simon, a former *Baltimore Sun* police reporter, has taken the opportunity to mount the bully pulpit and make his political views clear. And what he’s announced to practically every outlet that will have him is that he’s a fiery democratic socialist of the sort prone to rail about the “triumph of capitalism over human value,” declaring himself to be “very cynical” about the “economic imperatives” of the United States. He has asked how anyone could “report on a place like Baltimore” and “still regard the economic structure as being viable.” Simon, in other words, is of the school that takes a dim view of anything that smacks of treating individuals as mere economic units.

His show takes a different tack, but one that is equally encompassing and similarly reductive. People may not be economic units; instead, they are political units. On his show, every act, from a street-level drug deal to real-estate purchases, from the assignment of hours to dock workers to mayoral declarations, is a political gesture—and they are all connected. Again and again, the show drives home the point that there is no such thing as a truly individual action: It’s a world in which every decision, no matter how limited, has an impact on the whole.

Indeed, the signal conflict of *The Wire* is the friction between the individual and the collective. In each season, detective Jimmy McNulty, the closest character the show has to a protagonist, recklessly pursues his own agenda, and even when the show leads us to believe that he’s right in theory, his actions often prove detrimental to the department as a whole. In the current season, for example, he fabricates evidence of a serial killer in order to drum up financial support for a separate investigation—but ends up pulling away resources from important criminal work. The same is true on the other side of the law. In a previous season, Avon Barksdale, a drug kingpin returned to the streets after a stint in prison, ignores his partner’s business-minded approach to dealing and pursues a personal quest to take out a rival—a quest that ultimately proves deadly for his partner and results in jail time for Barksdale.

That’s typical of a series that traffics almost exclusively in bleak outcomes and blinkered viewpoints. Baltimore is portrayed as if Simon had stumbled upon Longfellow’s sentiment, “I have an affection for a great city. I feel safe in the neighborhood of man, and enjoy the sweet security of the streets,” and decided to do everything in his power to turn it upside down. There is nothing so lovingly expansive as Longfellow’s declaration; instead, everything and everyone in the show is afflicted by chronic myopia. Even the best of characters never realizes the true impact of his own actions, because he is never able to see beyond his own narrow focus. The perspective (or lack thereof) is evident even in the show’s filmmaking technique. While *The Wire*’s team of directors eschews the shaky handheld camerawork Simon helped pioneer in his first series, *Homicide: Life on the Street*, there is also a notable lack of overhead shots. Everything is shot on the ground, at street and eye level. In other words, no one has a broader perspective, though everyone could use one. In Simon’s Baltimore, the big picture is always elusive.

Listening to Simon talk about the series, it’s clear that he intends its portrayal of a bleak and broken city as a call to social reform: Better institutions and more compassionate ideas about human dignity and social organization are needed.

Yet Simon is not merely a social agitator; he is also a serious journalist, even in television, where he still claims to do original reporting for each season of the series. And what this always leads to is a recognition not just of the failure of various city institutions, but of their *inevitable* failure. The show’s bleakness is for all practical purposes an admission of a stark and surprisingly conservative—or at least libertarian—notion: Individual ambitions and human weaknesses will never truly be tamed, no matter how noble the collectivist project attempting to do so.

Simon, then, has inadvertently crafted a show that undercuts his own point, but is the better for it. His liberal instincts lean toward public-sector reformism, but his show illustrates, over and over again, its folly. In fact, it is the tension between Simon’s two competing impulses—the steely-eyed chronicler of human weakness on one hand and the angry social reformer on the other—that makes the series so compelling. Every scene evinces a sad, world-weary realism, yet no episode fails to demonstrate sweeping, humanistic passion as well. For Simon, the personal is always the political—and he’ll never let you forget he takes the political very personally. **NR**

■ FILM ■

Class War

ROSS DOUTHAT

STOP-LOSS isn't an anti-war movie for the latte-sipping, NPR-listening liberal pacifist pantywaist crowd. No *sir*. This is an anti-war movie for red-blooded Red State Americans. It's a love letter to the guys and gals who love their country and their country music. It's *The Best Years of Our Lives* for the jeeps-and-trucks and high-school-football crowd. It's *Coming Home* for the kind of kids who spend Saturday morning letting off steam at the shooting range and Saturday night dancing at the honkytonk. This isn't an anti-war movie for Hollywood and Manhattan; it's an anti-war movie for *Texas*.

More important, perhaps, it's an anti-war movie for Kimberly Peirce's kid brother. Peirce hasn't made a film since her celebrated 1999 debut, *Boys Don't Cry*, about the rape and murder of a female-to-male transsexual named Brandon Teena, and she's told reporters that her return to the director's chair was inspired in part by the experience of her younger brother, who enlisted in the Army after 9/11 and served with the 10th Mountain Division in Iraq. This personal connection helps explain much of what's good about *Stop-Loss*. Last autumn's raft of anti-war films seemed far more interested in American soldiers as vessels for their ideological preconceptions than as actual flesh-and-blood human beings, and the grunts who showed up in *Lions for Lambs*, *Redacted*, and *In the Valley of Elah* tended to be either martyrs, murderers, or both at once, depending on which flavor of anti-war polemic the filmmaker favored. Peirce's film, by contrast, feels like the work of someone who not only knows people in the military, but actually likes them—and who cares about making us like them as well.

But the sibling dynamic helps explain *Stop-Loss*'s weaknesses as well. Peirce's film seems to appreciate its tequila-shooting, tattoo-sporting characters in the way that you would expect an older sister—particularly a successful, gone-Hollywood older sister, who's left her trailer-park upbringing far behind—to like her headstrong, redneck, none-too-intellectual younger brother. The admiration is flavored with condescension, the love is more protective than respectful, and the audience is left with the impression that the men whose struggles *Stop-Loss* chronicles aren't really men at all, but immature kids too young to be entrusted with life-altering decisions, too vulnerable to handle hardship, and too easily taken advantage of by a wise and often wicked world.

The kids in question are a band of soldiers coming home to their small Texas town after a tour in Iraq; the tour included a bloody, harrowing ambush—depicted in the movie's opening sequence—that left one of their friends dead, another crippled, and all of the survivors scarred. The leader of the group is Brandon King (Ryan Phillippe); his closest pals are the huge and handsome Steve Shriver (Channing Tatum) and the bullet-headed, hot-tempered Tommy Burgess (Joseph Gordon-Levitt). Burgess is staying in the service, but King and Shriver are getting out—and in Shriver's case, at least, it isn't hard to see why, since he's got his fetching fiancée, Michele (Abbie Cornish), waiting impatiently for him to marry her.

Stop-Loss*'s Michele (Abbie Cornish)*

PARAMOUNT

There are two difficulties with their best-laid plans, however. The first is that all three friends are traumatized by what they've seen and done. Burgess, still in mourning for his dead best friend, can't stop drinking and picking pointless fights; Shriver spends his first night back madly digging a dugout in his front yard and then sleeping there, a gun clutched to his naked chest; and even Phillippe's King, the most level-headed of the lot, suffers hallucinations, flashbacks, and spasms of violent rage. The second problem is that the Army won't let King go. When he stops in to pick up his discharge papers, he's informed that he's been "stop-lossed," under a wartime policy that allows the military to keep volunteers serving in their units even after the tour of duty they've signed up for is complete.

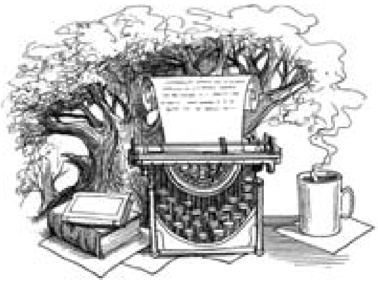
King resists, and then deserts. Accompanied by Michele, who's had a falling-out with her traumatized beau, he heads for Washington, hoping to plead his case to the upper reaches of the government. At this point, I thought I knew where the film was heading—toward a high-profile lawsuit, a media firestorm, and a courtroom dénouement, complete with some rousing speechifying about illegal wars and backdoor drafts. But Peirce, to her credit, has something less predictable in mind. Her roadtrippers never get to Washington; instead, they end up meandering through America, and through a series of wartime encounters—with bereaved parents, wounded comrades, and AWOL veterans—before circling back, eventually, to the same Texas town, and the same demons and dilemmas.

This narrative choice has real promise—better an episodic, elliptical polemic than a straightforward and didactic one—but the movie gradually fritters it away. Peirce's co-written screenplay is by turns leaden and overwrought, the acting is pedestrian (Cornish is fantastic, but you can see the strain as Phillippe tries to rise above his middling talent, and the rest of the male leads are in the same boat), and the film can't help browbeating its audience. *Stop-Loss* takes the small step of allowing that there might be good things about military men, and even military life in general, but it can't take the bigger, artistically necessary step of complicating the Iraq War. By "complicating," mind you, I don't mean that Peirce shouldn't have made an anti-war movie if that was where her politics took her. I mean that she shouldn't have made an anti-war movie in which every single major character who serves in Iraq ends up a suicide or a double amputee, a wife-beater or a hallucination-plagued vigilante.

Perhaps this sort of deck-stacking is an inevitable consequence of making anti-war films while the conflict in question is still going on. The temptation to overstate the case, in the hopes that *your* movie will be the pebble that starts an "Out of Iraq Now" avalanche, is no doubt nearly irresistible. But until somebody in Hollywood is strong enough to resist it, an occasionally likeable, largely lousy film like *Stop-Loss* is probably the best Iraq-related fare that we can hope for—which isn't saying much. **NR**

■ COUNTRY LIFE ■

Trust



RICHARD BROOKHISER

‘DON’T worry, they will come back.” The speaker is my wife; they are a pair of ducks that visit the pond down the lawn from our house; this is the time of year when they do indeed come back. The worrier who watches for their arrival is me.

Our pond is small and man-made, dug out of the edge of a marsh with a bulldozer a few decades ago. A stream flows in one end and out the other; autumns of leaves are bringing its shallow margins up to ground level. Canada geese don’t like it (thank goodness—they are excrement machines). Noble in flight, they have a laborious takeoff, which the tight surface and surrounding trees do not suit. Ducks, who with their rapid wing beat and strong shoulders can lift right up in an emergency, like it just fine.

The ducks are mallards. I read in some bird book that they are the most common species in the world, covering Eurasia as well as North America. The duck breasts whose carving is dinner theater at the Four Seasons belonged to domesticated mallard cousins. The male is striking, as gaudy as anything gets in cold climates: dark bright green head, white neck ring, touches of blue on its wings. His mate is pure plainness. After the snow melts, the only things in ponds and marshes are mud, dead grass, and last year’s leaves. The brown female blends in perfectly, invisible at first, and even second and third glance.

Generally both are wary, with reason. Feeding is a ridiculous and dangerous operation. They tip their heads under water, picking at I don’t know what, tilting their rumps up in the air. You recall the cartoon coyotes of childhood, salivating over their own next meals, as cartoon ducks did this. The real mallards spell each other as they eat, but take the extra precaution of distance, sliding around the circumference of the pond away from wherever anyone else, animal or human, may be, paddling down the exit stream into the marsh if strangers are too persistent. But sometimes they are in their own world. One day as we sat by the pond, the ducks landed in front of us. How nice! Then suddenly a second male arrived, touching off a duck brawl. The men butted green heads, charging, splashing, utterly in earnest. She swam primly away to the side. After many minutes of this, one of the males gave up and flew off. Since they were essentially identical (to our eyes, at any rate), we could not tell whether we had witnessed a triumph of monogamy, or of an avian David Paterson. Sex had given us quite a show, as it always does, and we hadn’t even paid for it.

The mallards are one of the first signs of the new year to come, which is why I worry they will not come. Peepers are a month off. No native flowers are up. The trees are just showing buds. Pails on sugar maples are still collecting sap. “The snow dissolv’d no more is seen,” as Samuel Johnson put it, but every morning the pond wears a skin of ice. Winter is over, but spring hesitates. Who will fill the gap?

The mallards are one of the first signs of the new year to come, which is why I worry they will not come. Winter is over, but spring hesitates. Who will fill the gap?

The mallards do because they have to. The display of manliness is followed by reproduction, and for a few weeks the pair trails a string of ducklings. The family shrinks as predators do their work; some years, all the pretty ones are taken off at once. But the adult ducks keep at it, as their successors will when these particular ducks encounter chefs or coyotes. We just have to trust.

We also have to trust in disaster. A quarter of a mile away on the next road, a 45-year-old friend collapsed in her father’s arms, did not respond to her brother’s CPR. The cause of death was pulmonary embolism; the only pre-existing ailment was a broken leg. It’s not supposed to happen this way, her father said, meaning that the child should not go before the parent. But it does happen that way, a lot; though it happens the other way too, even more often. There is no third possibility. “We don’t get to write the book,” said an old family friend at the wake. “I could suggest some revisions,” said my wife. “Don’t waste your breath,” I said, “the author isn’t listening” (at least, not to suggestions of that kind). You will lose on the curve, or on the straightaway. Trust it.

From time to time man gets it into his head to improve the odds. “Many have been and still are of the opinion that worldly affairs are in a way governed by fortune,” wrote Machiavelli, “and for this reason they would conclude that there is no point in sweating much over these things.” Machiavelli, however, did sweat, because he believed “fortune is a woman, and it is necessary, if one wishes to hold her down, to beat her and fight with her.” Machiavelli is everyone’s favorite villain, but he had his reasons. Italy when he wrote was a sinkhole of corruption and war; if Italians pulled their socks up, couldn’t they make their lives better? Most political philosophers, except the quietists, have agreed with him; even the *Federalist Papers*, while dispensing with his Lina Wertmüller rhetoric, talked about creating government by “reflection and choice,” rather than “accident and force.”

We benefit from Machiavelli’s hope and the founders’ labors every day. Never stop working; there is always work to do. But don’t forget what we know from watching ducks and disaster. The founders themselves were obsessed with nature—its laws, its God, its relation to justice. This was abstract nature, filtered through analysis and hypotheses. But even such nature as that is assembled from the rhythms of what happens to us and around us. Life and death come round and round, as do enjoyment and suffering. Skip worry; you’ll deal when you have to. **NR**

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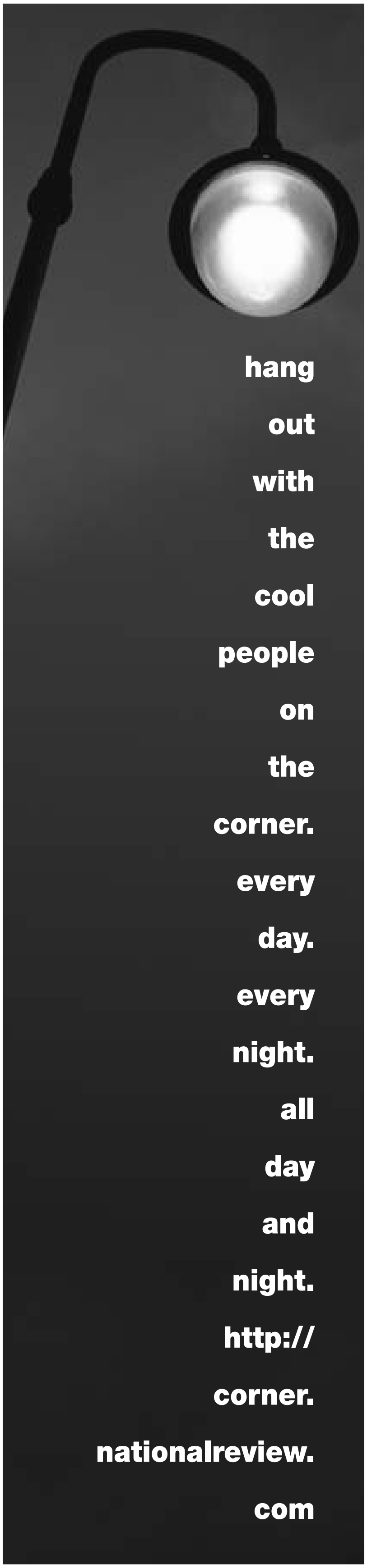

happy warrior

MARK STEYN

Apostasy in Moderation

LAST month, during the Vatican's Easter vigil, Magdi Allam, the deputy editor of Italy's *Corriere della Sera* newspaper, converted from Islam to Catholicism. And not for the first time I was reminded of an old joke I modified for my book *America Alone*:

A ten-dollar bill is in the center of the crossroads. To the north, there's Santa Claus. To the west, the Tooth Fairy. To the east, a radical Muslim. To the south, a moderate Muslim. Who reaches the ten-dollar bill first?

Answer: the radical Muslim. All the others are mythical creatures.

Signor Allam is merely the latest mythical "moderate Muslim." There are, to be sure, millions of Muslims who just want to get on with their lives, raise their families, do their jobs, get a nice house in the suburbs, and practice as much or as little Islam as they can get away with. But there is no "moderate Islam" to provide any institutional support for such individual Muslim moderation, and there is an acute shortage of Western Muslims who can plausibly demonstrate to their coreligionists a viable balance between Islam and the Western world, who can act as a counterweight both to the explicitly jihadist radicals and to the lavishly endowed Muslim lobby groups who more discreetly share their aims. Magdi Allam was a key figure in the "Secular Islam" summit held in Florida a year ago, and one of several prominent signatories of the "St. Petersburg Declaration" issued at its conclusion. He was by that point being reviled by Tariq Ramadan as a "Copt"—i.e., a Christian—which wasn't true: On the eve of his 40th birthday, he accompanied his mother on a pilgrimage to Mecca. Yet he has now, and very publicly, found Christ, and so retrospectively confirmed Tariq Ramadan's point—that Magdi Allam was never a credible model for 21st-century Islam.

And so it goes. Ayaan Hirsi Ali is a phenomenally brave woman but she is not a "moderate Muslim": She is an atheist. Irshad Manji is a brilliant dissector of Islam's pathologies but she is not a "moderate Muslim": She is a lesbian, and thus, to almost all her coreligionists, cannot be any kind of Muslim. Wafa Sultan is the Californian psychiatrist who at huge personal risk went mano a mano with an A-list Sunni scholar live on Al Jazeera, crushed every one of his arguments, and nevertheless lost. Why? Here's the answer:

. . . for which they'll try to kill him.

MARCO DI LAURO/GETTY

"I am not a Christian, a Muslim, or a Jew," Sultan told her interrogator. "I am a secular human being who does not believe in the supernatural."

"If you are a heretic," scoffed Ibrahim al-Khouli, "there is no point in rebuking you, since you have blasphemed against Islam, the Prophet, and the Koran."

In their debate, Sultan won every point but lost the match. Her innumerable aces only confirmed her opponent's argument—that to embrace "modernity" (in the Western sense) is to lose your faith: Sultan is an incisive, intelligent, rational woman—and she is no longer Muslim. Signor Allam held out longer than most before concluding that the intellectual straddle required of a "moderate Muslim" is beyond even Larry Craig's wide stance: "I asked myself how it was possible that those who, like me, sincerely and boldly called for a 'moderate Islam,'" he said, "ended up being sentenced to death in the name of Islam on the basis of the Koran. I was forced to see that, beyond the contingency of the phenomenon of Islamic extremism and terrorism that has appeared on a global level, the root of evil is inherent in an Islam that is physiologically violent and historically conflictive." The newly baptized Christian knows that he will be targeted for murder, but he was already targeted for murder as a "moderate Muslim," and, as he sees it, it is better to die for truth than for a tortured contradiction.

What the West calls "moderate Muslims" Islam regards as apostates. Sometimes, as with Sultan, they're atheist apostates; sometimes, as with Manji, they're lesbian apostates; and sometimes, as with Allam, they're Christian apostates. To Islam, it doesn't matter which branch of apostasy you opt for: As the Prophet Mohammed puts it, "Whoever changes his religion, kill him." All four principal schools of Islamic jurisprudence agree. So do the 36 percent of young Muslims in Britain who believe apostasy should be punished by death. But, to the West, which branch of apostasy has most appeal to Muslims is an interesting question.

On one hand, Allam's conversion is bad news. It's bad news for those who are pinning their hopes on a genuine "moderate Muslim" leadership that can provide an alternative to the Saudi-funded radicalization of European Islam. It's also bad news because it means that, in the absence of real "moderate Muslims," Western governments will continue to throw money at those who merely pose as such—like the Green Lane Mosque in Birmingham, England, which the city council has deemed one of its approved "partnership organizations," notwithstanding that at least one sermon therein advocated hurling homosexuals off mountaintops.

But, on the other hand, it's good news in that it suggests the most effective strategy against the resurgence of Islam may be the oldest of all—an evangelizing Christianity.

As I said, that's the good news—if you're so inclined. To the cowed accommodationist governments of a largely post-Christian Christendom, it no doubt sounds like the worst news of all. **NR**

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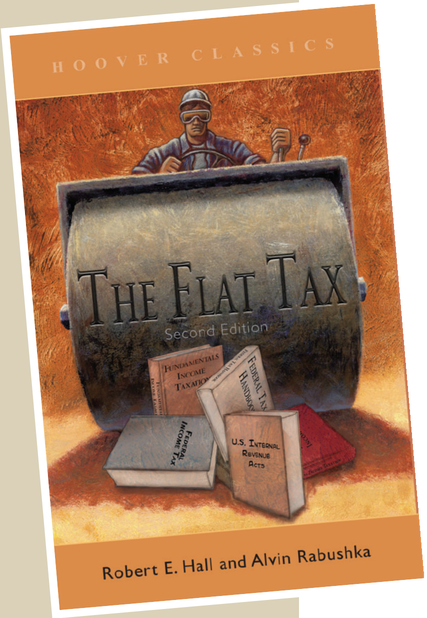

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